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Official Records

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 16

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/326)

Draft resolution (A/61/L.25)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.25.

Mr. Matussek (Germany): I have the honour today to introduce the General Assembly's draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan. On this occasion, let me share a few thoughts with all of you.

One year ago, the United Nations looked forward to the formation of a freely elected Parliament of Afghanistan in December 2005. This step marked the successful completion of the Bonn process. This process has focused on institutional transition. Much was achieved since the Bonn Agreement of 2001. Within four years, Afghanistan has given itself a modern constitution and, after free presidential and parliamentary elections, formed a competent Government. The United Nations played a key role in helping to organize the transition.

Today, the United Nations continues to play a key and legitimate role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan within the framework of the Afghanistan Compact.

We commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) under Tom Koenigs' excellent leadership for its outstanding work under sometimes difficult conditions. Germany welcomes the expansion of UNAMA's presence throughout the country, security conditions permitting.

We appreciate that the Security Council recently visited Afghanistan to gain first-hand information.

After the successful process of institutional transition, the Afghanistan Compact redefined our shared vision for all sectors of Afghanistan's reconstruction until 2010.

The Compact reflects the renewed commitment of the international community in an Afghanistan that is now reassuming ownership of its future. And it also reflects an integrated approach to the four main sectors — security, governance, development and combating the narcotics industry.

But the Compact is more than a broad political vision. It is a precise road map for Afghanistan and the international community with benchmarks and timelines.

In the past months we have been confronted with a number of challenges, especially in some provinces, namely, insecurity, a thriving drug industry and the lack of good governance. All these are threatening the achievements of the past years.

As the Secretary General states in his latest report,

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"[t]he recent upsurge of violence represents a watershed. At no time since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 has the threat to Afghanistan's transition been so severe" (A/61/326, para. 4).

About 4,000 Afghans were killed in the course of this year alone. The security situation in Afghanistan, especially, but not only, in the southern provinces, is serious. The United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is confronted in the south with a new quality of insurgency and in the east with Taliban, Al Qaida and other extremist groups.

Opium production is at its highest level ever with an increase of almost 50 per cent in 2006. The southern province of Helmand has become the largest opium producer in the world. The drug industry in Afghanistan involves more than 2 million people and generates resources amounting to approximately \$3 billion. This drug money fuels, to a large extent, insurgency and corruption throughout Afghanistan.

Lack of good governance and corruption are another key problem we are facing today. If the Afghan man and woman in the street cannot realize tangible progress in all parts of the country, we shall face the risk of losing support for our joint efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. More emphasis on the fight against corruption is necessary. We also need to multiply our efforts to build capacity in the Afghan administration. Reform of public administration has to be prioritized.

The Afghanistan Compact provides us with an excellent strategic approach to these challenges. We need to implement the objectives we have agreed upon in a more consistent manner.

I have already addressed the key issues of governance and the drug industry. As to security sector reform, we have registered some progress, but no major success yet, in spite of all our efforts. In the absence of more effective State forces, the disarmament of illegal militias remains slow. The Afghan National Army has reached only half of its planned strength. Nevertheless, this army provides valuable contributions to fighting the insurgency. It is respected by the people of Afghanistan.

The Afghan National Police has been provided with a well-trained leadership. It still lacks qualified, motivated manpower in the lower ranks. Germany, as the key partner on police reform, will encourage more partners to engage in police training in order to

accelerate progress throughout the country. We welcome that the European Union will become more involved in justice sector reform. Quick progress in terms of law enforcement is also urgently needed.

In terms of economic and social recovery, advances have been made, but progress remains uneven. Insecurity and corruption hamper development in several regions. However, we should not overlook the achievements — over 2,000 kilometres of roads have been repaired and tarred, many towns have been supplied with drinking water, the power supply has improved, about 80 per cent of the population now has access to health care, girls are returning to schools and women are reassuming functions in public life.

Many people in Afghanistan are now better off than five years ago and nobody is worse off than in 2001. We should recognize these achievements and work harder to achieve even more and prevent reversals in some regions.

Another key factor for stability and prosperity in Afghanistan is regional cooperation, in particular with Pakistan. We believe that both countries can only benefit from closer cooperation. We also welcome regional economic initiatives such as the second regional Economic Cooperation Conference, held recently in New Delhi.

In terms of implementation of the Afghanistan Compact, we should strengthen the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board as the key instrument for coordinating and monitoring the reconstruction process. The Board assembles all stakeholders and major partners, and is jointly co-chaired by the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA.

The challenge is, as it was put recently during the third session of the Board, to move from Compact to impact. We do not see a need for new instruments. Germany envisages hosting a Board session at the political level in 2007 during its Group of Eight presidency.

As to Germany's continued role, we have been involved in the international efforts since late 2001, when we hosted the Petersberg Conference to agree on the political transition after the fall of the Taliban regime. Since then, Germany has been a major donor and the lead nation on police reform.

We also continue to provide one of the largest troop contingents to the International Security

Assistance Force (ISAF). At this stage, almost 3,000 men and women are serving in Afghanistan. With the expansion this year of ISAF operations throughout the country, Germany took over the command of the northern region in Mazari Sharif.

Members may have noticed that this year's draft resolution consists for the first time of one single text. We have overcome the habit of adopting two texts focusing on security and on humanitarian issues, which increasingly overlapped. Last year, moreover, many delegations also expressed the wish to adopt this format.

The draft resolution before the Assembly, while carrying more than 90 per cent of the consensus language of previous years, is now structured like the Afghanistan Compact. It includes security, governance, development and counter-narcotics. We believe that by adopting this draft resolution today the General Assembly will not only prove its ability to change its habits; the message will be that the Assembly endorses the Afghanistan Compact. The number of sponsors — well over 100 — emphasizes that message.

The overall prospects may be less optimistic than a year ago. We believe that we have recognized the challenges and that we have the means to meet them. The commitments made to the United Nations, NATO, the European Union and other organizations and institutions should be honoured by all of us.

We should not lose sight of the unparalleled achievements in Afghanistan since 2001, nor underestimate the risks of failure for this country, the region and the whole international community. Much more has to be done in the future. Together we remain committed to create a free, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): Every year the General Assembly convenes to consider the annual draft resolution entitled "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security".

We express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report of 11 September 2006 on the situation in Afghanistan (A/61/326). It provides a comprehensive overview of the developments over the past six months.

In adopting the Afghanistan Compact in January 2006 in London, Afghanistan and the international

community committed to a second phase of international engagement beyond the Bonn process. Today we continue our efforts towards achieving the goals set out in the Afghanistan Compact. However, despite our progress, we are mindful of the significant challenges that remain.

The recent increase in the number of terrorist attacks, particularly along the southern and south-eastern border of the country, represents the most significant threat to the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. We remain concerned over the fact that those who seek to wreak havoc on and terrorize Afghan society continue to receive and rely on military, financial and logistical support from outside Afghanistan.

Indeed, without such support, terrorists would not be able to conduct well-planned attacks against nearly all segments of society on a consistent basis. We reiterate, therefore, the need for the international community to bring an end to foreign intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Enhanced focus on addressing the external sources fuelling the increase in the level of terrorist activities will be instrumental in achieving this objective.

In that regard, allow me to refer briefly to paragraph 8 of the Secretary-General's report of 11 September 2006, in which he states,

"The leadership relies heavily on cross-border fighters, many of whom are Afghans drawn from nearby refugee camps and radical seminaries in Pakistan ... They are trained and paid to serve as medium-level commanders, leading operations inside Afghanistan, and they are able to retreat back to safe havens outside the country."

As stated by President Karzai in September in his address to the General Assembly,

"We must look beyond Afghanistan to the sources of terrorism. We must destroy terrorist sanctuaries beyond Afghanistan, dismantle the elaborate networks in the region that recruit, indoctrinate, train, finance, arm and deploy terrorists" (A/61/PV.12, p. 2).

Regional cooperation is vital to effectively combat international terrorism. We reiterate the importance of sincere and honest efforts by neighbouring countries to achieve our shared objectives. A more comprehensive and robust

campaign against international terrorism will not only benefit the cause of peace and stability in Afghanistan, but will also serve the interests of the region and beyond. We look forward to enhanced cooperation and coordination with our brotherly neighbour Pakistan within the framework of the Tripartite Commission.

On the basis of the proposal of President Karzai, we are in the process of preparing to convene a cross-border jirga, comprising influential tribal and religious figures from both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, with a view to assessing ways and means to eliminate the scourge of terrorism from Afghanistan and from the region. We consider that meeting an important initiative in fostering enhanced cooperation in the combat against terrorism.

Significant progress has been made towards the formation of a fully functional and capable national army and police. Despite the lack of resources available to our security institutions, both the national army and the police are engaged in challenging combat operations against remnants of the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups in the southern and south-eastern provinces of the country. However, both the army and the police continue to face significant challenges. Lack of modern equipment and logistical support and extensive delays in the payment of salaries of soldiers and police have had a drastic impact on the effectiveness of both institutions.

As my delegation indicated at the Security Council meeting of 26 July 2006, on the situation in Afghanistan, a significant improvement in the overall security situation will require additional support by the international community for our security institutions. We are pleased to note that this issue has been rightfully reflected in this year's draft resolution in the Assembly.

The recent conclusion of the third phase of the nationwide expansion of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been an important step towards attaining security and stability in the country. The national army and police continue to conduct joint military operations alongside ISAF and coalition forces in the combat against terrorism. We welcome the recent inclusion of ISAF as a member of the Tripartite Commission.

Substantial progress in the social and economic development of the country will be vital to overall success in the country. The pace of reconstruction has

not been parallel to the achievements that have taken place in other areas. Having presented our interim National Development Strategy earlier this year, we remain on track to present the full Afghanistan National Development Strategy by the end of 2008.

We stress the need for the sustained support of the international community for the implementation of the Compact and the interim National Development Strategy. In that regard, we highlight the need to channel donor assistance through the Afghan national budget, while stressing the leadership role of the Afghan Government in designating development priorities. The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board continues to make progress in carrying out its important mandate and recently convened its third periodic meeting, on 12 November, where it reviewed the progress made on 11 benchmarks that are scheduled to be completed by the end of this year.

Enhanced regional economic cooperation is vital for the timely and effective implementation of the Compact and for the consolidation of peace and security in the country. We express utmost appreciation to the Government of India for having co-hosted with us, the second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, which was convened in New Delhi on 18 and 19 November 2006. We were pleased to have witnessed broad participation by representatives of neighbouring countries and other international partners at the Conference. At the conclusion of the two-day meeting, participants reaffirmed the central importance of Afghanistan's development to the growth, stability and prosperity of the region.

The Government of Afghanistan attaches great importance to the fight against corruption and narcotics as key components of the Afghanistan Compact. The dangerous link between the production of narcotics and terrorism poses another threat to the stability and social development of Afghanistan. The updated Afghan National Drug Control Strategy, presented at the London Conference on Afghanistan, offers a multifaceted approach to curtail and eliminate that scourge.

We have taken a series of measures at the national level towards the implementation of our National Strategy. As noted in the report of the Secretary General, the specialized counter-narcotics unit of the Afghan National Police seized

approximately 66 tons of narcotics during the first half of 2006. Furthermore, the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics has enhanced its cooperation with the Counter-Narcotics Tribunal, the Counter-Narcotics Criminal Justice Task Force and other relevant agencies.

Despite our efforts, we continue to face significant challenges in our combat against narcotics. Additional support from the international community will be required for the implementation of our national drug control strategy. As emphasized on numerous occasions, particular focus should be accorded to the provision of alternative livelihoods to farmers as an essential element of a successful counter-narcotics strategy.

The fight against corruption remains a top priority of the Afghan Government. We have signed the United Nations Convention against Corruption and remain completely committed to its ratification by the end of 2006. National legislation will be enacted to facilitate the implementation of the Convention by the end of 2007. In that regard, a mechanism will be established with a mandate to monitor and evaluate the process.

Pursuant to the instructions of President Karzai, the Government has embarked upon a comprehensive initiative aimed at enhancing transparency and good governance in various Government institutions. As part of this initiative, the Government has established an anti-corruption committee, headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and composed of numerous agencies, to come up with additional recommendations for further action by the President.

Before concluding, we would like to welcome the recent visit of the Security Council mission to Afghanistan, which took place from 9 to 17 November. The visit was seen as a reaffirmation of the international community's unwavering support for Afghanistan. Once again, Afghanistan reaffirms its solemn commitment to overcome the remaining challenges to achieving the provisions of the Afghanistan Compact and the Millennium Development Goals with the support of our international partners.

In conclusion, allow me to express my delegation's appreciation to Ambassador Thomas Matussek and the German delegation for their hard and fruitful work in leading the informal consultations on

the draft resolution before us. Special thanks also go to Ms. Beate Maeder-Metcalf and Ms. Marlies Stecher for their personal efforts in this regard. We also extend our deep appreciation to the more than 105 Member States that sponsored this year's draft resolution A/61/L.25, so eloquently introduced by the Ambassador of Germany, which I hope will be adopted, like similar texts in previous years, by consensus.

Mrs. Schroderus-Fox (Finland): I am speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU). The following countries align themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, as well as Ukraine and Moldova.

The European Union very much welcomes the opportunity for the General Assembly to take stock of the developments in Afghanistan and supports the draft resolution (A/61/L.25) under consideration. We commend the German delegation for its work on the draft resolution. All EU member States are sponsors of the draft resolution.

This year we are adopting a single draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan, unlike in previous years. This step reflects developments both in Afghanistan and in the evolving partnership between the international community and Afghanistan, which are redefined and endorsed in the Afghanistan Compact of January 2006.

Like the Compact, the draft resolution builds on a comprehensive and integrated approach by outlining a broad range of issues relevant to Afghanistan and to the international community. Indeed, this holistic approach on Afghanistan is very much needed. In promoting development, we, as donors, sometimes look too much at the various development sectors, indicators, trust funds and programmes. It is vital to look at Afghanistan as a whole and pay attention to the most critical aspects on the way to a more secure and prosperous future for the country and its people. At the same time, we must always check our expectations and remember that nation-building is a long and difficult process. There are no shortcuts.

The past year has heralded significant political progress in Afghanistan. The draft resolution before us pays tribute to it. Significantly, the new parliament has started its work actively and with a reformist agenda in, among other things, approving the Supreme Court and the cabinet. The building of functional, transparent

and accountable Afghan institutions, both at the central level and in the provinces, is the most urgent task at hand.

Yet the challenges remain daunting. The latest report of the Secretary-General (A/61/326) paints a grim picture of the deteriorating security situation, particularly in some parts of Afghanistan. The extent and reach of violence caused by the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups, the sophistication of their weaponry and the increasing brutality of their tactics threaten to undermine our achievements.

Popular frustration in Afghanistan is simmering due to the lack of security and development, especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country. Challenges in governance and human rights, anti-corruption and counter-narcotic efforts and infrastructure development remain formidable. The slow advancement of the process of the disbandment of illegal armed groups undermines development in other sectors, particularly the dismantling of the drug economy.

In facing these manifold challenges, Afghanistan is not alone. There is a strong commitment by the international community to the development of Afghanistan, embodied in the Afghanistan Compact. This continued commitment to an Afghan-led process of stabilization and reconstruction has most recently been expressed by a visit of a Security Council mission to Afghanistan.

The United Nations, mainly through the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), continues to have a key role in the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact. UNAMA co-chairs, together with the Government of Afghanistan, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board. UNAMA's role in finding political and regional solutions to the challenges facing Afghanistan is highly appreciated by the European Union, and we would like to support an even stronger role by UNAMA in this regard. We also welcome plans to expand UNAMA's presence throughout the field, security permitting.

Regional partners of Afghanistan have a special role and responsibility, as is also recognized in the draft resolution. In this respect we welcome the intent by Presidents Karzai and Musharraf to improve bilateral collaboration against the insurgents, as well as

the plans to hold two large tribal jirgas, one on each side of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

The European Union and Afghanistan adopted a Joint Political Declaration on 16 November 2005, in which the EU affirmed its commitment to long-term support of the Government and people of Afghanistan through Afghan-led reconstruction efforts. Afghan leadership and responsibility will be of key importance in this process. EU assistance will mainly aim at fostering the establishment of a democratic, accountable, sustainable and self-sufficient Afghan State, capable of exercising its sovereignty and protecting the rights of its citizens. The European Union attaches special importance to the protection of the rights of women and children. Human rights remain our cross-cutting priority.

From the outset of the reconstruction process, we have been actively supporting counter-narcotics efforts. Earlier this year the EU adopted an action-oriented plan to combat the production of drugs in Afghanistan and trafficking from Afghanistan along heroin routes. The EU and its member States believe that the National Drug Control Strategy represents an appropriate approach for tackling the problem at the current time, under the ownership and primary responsibility of the Afghan Government. In this context, the European Union believes that anti-corruption policies are essential components of counter-narcotics efforts. The EU, however, recognizes that the Afghan Government does not have the means to deliver on its objectives alone and that it will need the sustained support of the international community for many years to come.

The European Union places particular importance on the rule of law, and we are currently considering ways to increase our engagement in that sector. A European Union assessment mission on the rule of law and governance, including police, has recently returned from Afghanistan, and its findings will be important in planning priorities for future engagement.

For its own part, the EU has collectively disbursed one third of all development assistance to Afghanistan during the period 2002-2006. The EU aims to increase its counter-narcotics assistance to Afghanistan in line with the relevant actions foreseen in the EU drugs action plan 2005-2008. The EU has pledged over €250 million starting in 2005, along with additional trainers, mentors and other personnel to support the development of Afghan capacity in the

fight against drugs. With about half of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coming from European Union member States, the EU is strongly committed to improving the security of Afghanistan in close coordination with NATO.

The EU continues to support the Afghanistan Compact and considers it the principal framework for the future reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan in a more coordinated fashion until 2010. We support the continued central role of the United Nations in the implementation of the Compact, in supporting and encouraging the Afghan Government as well as in the monitoring and coordination of donor activity by the international community. A stronger role for UNAMA is the key to improving coordination of activities in the fields of governance, rule of law, reconstruction and development, as well as in coordinating international assistance. The EU will coordinate closely its actions and programmes with the United Nations, its agencies and other relevant international organizations.

To conclude, let me stress that the European Union remains committed to the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan. We continue to work in close collaboration with the Afghan Government and our international partners to build an Afghanistan whose prosperity and stability match the hopes, the strength and the fortitude of its people.

Mr. Jeenbaev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the honour to make a statement on behalf of the States members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

These States maintain friendly relations with their close neighbour, Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan has a substantial impact on stability and security in a region where the SCO is increasingly active. The members of our organization are closely following the peace settlement and rehabilitation process in Afghanistan and are satisfied that some progress can be observed. In political terms Afghanistan has adopted a new constitution, held presidential and parliamentary elections and re-established the institutions of public authority and governance, laying the foundation for the continued development of the country. In the economic area, the

Afghan leadership has demonstrated its commitment to post-war rehabilitation, relying on international assistance and its own resources. The SCO welcomes the aspirations of the people and the Government of Afghanistan to the earliest possible peaceful revival of the nation.

However, Afghanistan continues to face a considerable number of dangerous threats and challenges. We are gravely concerned at the degradation of the security situation due to increasing violence throughout the country. The violence and scale of recent terrorist attacks testify to the fragility of the political situation in Afghanistan. Recently, militant armed formations of the Taliban and Al-Qaida have increased their confrontations with the Government and the international presence thus undermining international community efforts towards post-conflict settlement and the economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan. We are particularly concerned about the fact that in a number of provinces the Taliban has already begun to establish parallel bodies of government and justice.

The increasing threat from intransigent extremists makes it particularly urgent to ensure strict compliance, including by the Government of Afghanistan, with the sanctions regime introduced by the Security Council. We agree that it is important to implement the national reconciliation programme with a view to the long-term stabilization of the situation in the country. However, that process should not work against the Security Council's decisions and the objective of the total elimination of the terrorist threat existing within the territory of the country.

We are seriously concerned at the fact that a number of individuals on the sanctions list of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to Council resolution 1267 (1999) have been included in Government bodies of Afghanistan, and at the attempts to exclude from that list former high-ranking Taliban activists who are associated with serious crimes. The overall unstable situation has also been aggravated by the persistently acute narcotic threat that affects both the fight against terrorism and the reform of the Government.

Unfortunately, the efforts of the international community and the Afghan authorities to counter drug production and trafficking have not had the desired effect. An important condition to achieve substantial

progress in that direction is eradication of the bases and sources of drug production in Afghanistan. We are concerned by the forecasts of United Nations experts who envisage substantially larger poppy crops in Afghanistan this year compared to last. It is becoming extremely urgent to implement comprehensive measures to counter the drug traffic from Afghanistan, including the creation of anti-drug security belts along the Afghan border and the reinforcement of existing ones.

We are satisfied with the outcome of the Paris 2 — Moscow 1 international conference on countering Afghan drug traffic, held in Moscow on 26-28 June 2006. It made a tangible contribution to strengthening the Paris process and to establishing a coalition of States to fight the transborder narcotic threat from Afghanistan. It is essential to translate the Conference decisions into concrete action as soon as possible.

The SCO pursues a policy of intensifying its multidimensional cooperation with Afghanistan and has established a contact group to strengthen SCO cooperation with that country. Our priority remains to strengthen all facets of our interaction in combating terrorism, separatism, extremism and illicit drug trafficking. The SCO member States are directly affected by these acute challenges; we possess the political will and the capacity to counter them.

Our organization is also open to deepening our anti-drug partnership with non-regional players.

The achievement of lasting peace, security and economic progress in Afghanistan is in the interests of the people of Afghanistan, the other States of the region and the entire international community. Without long-term assistance and support from the outside, Afghanistan will be incapable of resolving its large-scale problems. The United Nations must preserve its leading role in coordinating international efforts for post-conflict settlement and rehabilitation in Afghanistan, including at the post-Bonn stage.

Members of the SCO have provided useful help to Afghanistan. For example, last January, China pledged to provide 80 million yuan in grants to Afghanistan, in addition to its previous pledge of \$150 million, which is being fulfilled. From 2002 to 2005, Russia provided \$200 million in grants for the development of national defence capacity. This year, the Russian Federation, in the context of the Paris

Club, agreed to the cancellation of Afghanistan's debt of \$11.2 billion. The Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China have been helping in the construction of energy infrastructure, roads and tunnels, irrigation systems and public health care; providing assistance in materials; and training diplomats, economic management officials and police. The members of SCO will continue to provide extensive assistance to the Afghan people through various channels.

The stabilization of Afghanistan will contribute to accelerating the integration process in the region and provide the SCO with the opportunity fully to utilize its potential in assisting the social and economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan's Government.

We hope that the international community and the Government of Afghanistan will succeed in their joint efforts to implement the Afghanistan reconstruction programme formulated in the London Compact and endorsed by the G-8 summit in Saint Petersburg. To that end, it will be necessary to ensure within the established time frame the solution of key issues in the spheres of security, governance, human rights and the fight against the drug threat. It is our understanding that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan will organize the strict monitoring and coordination of the proper implementation of the Compact. The involvement of all sectors of society and political, ethnic and religious groups in establishing sovereign and effective statehood in Afghanistan is an integral part of ensuring long-term stabilization in that country. We support the General Assembly's draft resolution on Afghanistan, prepared by a large group of sponsors. We hope that its adoption by consensus will contribute to enhancing the agreed efforts of the international community in Afghanistan.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) — Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

We support the conclusions contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, as well as the draft resolution on Afghanistan. We thank Germany for coordinating the revision of the draft resolution.

We note that some progress has been achieved in the political formation process in Afghanistan. The new Constitution has been adopted and presidential and parliamentary elections have been held. Those tasks were completed largely thanks to the significant and multifaceted support of the United Nations. It is important to maintain the coordinating role of the United Nations during the post-Bonn period.

At the same time, the CSTO member States are concerned about the new outbreak of violence and terror provoked by the Taliban and Al-Qaida. The deterioration of the security situation not only slows the pace of reconstruction in Afghanistan, but also jeopardizes the results achieved in the political, social and economic fields. The considerable rise in the number of casualties in the course of military operations, compared to last year, is deeply regrettable. In that regard, it is important to ensure the comprehensive implementation of the sanctions regime imposed by the Security Council.

The creation of stable Afghan statehood is a key factor of the long-term stabilization of the country. The stability of the State system in Afghanistan is a basis for the normalization of the security situation, as well as for the successful conduct of social and economic reforms and the implementation of the international rehabilitation programme approved by the United Nations.

The CSTO member States are interested in peace, stability and economic prosperity in Afghanistan. Two of the seven CSTO member States — Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — are Afghanistan's northern neighbours. Twenty five per cent of Afghanistan's frontier lies on the southern borders of CSTO countries.

CSTO activities seek to provide security in the zone of its responsibility. In order to defend the collective and national interests of its member States, CSTO is enhancing its potential for countering such global challenges and threats as international terrorism, extremism and the illegal circulation of narcotics.

Therefore, Afghanistan's orientation remains one of the priorities of CSTO activities. CSTO is ready to contribute to solving the security problems both by mitigating their consequences and by addressing their root causes. We believe that the establishment of multifaceted regional cooperation is an important factor of promoting a settlement in Afghanistan. Such regional cooperation may include cooperation between

Afghanistan and neighbouring countries on a wide range of security issues and economic projects, and in countering the drug threat. A special working group on Afghanistan was created within the Council of Foreign Ministers of CSTO to establish such cooperation.

CSTO is concerned by the rise in drug production in Afghanistan. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan poses a serious threat to regional and global security. CSTO assumes with due responsibility the challenges raised by the geographical location of its member States. We consider our mission to be one of stemming the flow of drugs by all possible means, in close cooperation with the members of the anti-narcotics coalition. The problem of international crime in the modern environment can be effectively addressed only by the joint efforts of the law-enforcement agencies of different countries.

The most recent example of the practical anti-drug-trafficking activity of CSTO member States was the successful implementation of the international preventive operation known as Channel 2006. Operation Channel has been implemented regularly since 2003 by the law-enforcement agencies of CSTO member States. A coordination board of agency heads was created in 2004. The efficiency of the collective anti-narcotic efforts within CSTO is growing annually.

The goal of the operation is to stem drug flows from Afghanistan into the territories of the States participating in the operation, as well as to expose and suppress the smuggling of heroin production components to the Central Asian States and Afghanistan. The October 2006 operation resulted in the removal from illegal circulation of approximately five tons of drugs. Moreover, 500 firearms and more than 28,000 rounds of ammunition were confiscated.

The international community should step up its efforts to provide comprehensive assistance to the Government of Afghanistan to eliminate the root causes hindering the stabilization and post-conflict rehabilitation of the country. CSTO member States possess the necessary knowledge and experience, as well as economic and technological potential that can be effectively exploited in that respect. In particular, we feel that CSTO can play an indispensable role in the realization of projects in the framework of the Afghanistan Compact. We are also ready to provide a wide range of inexpensive, high-quality products necessary for the successful realization of projects,

including by filling future orders placed with CSTO member States by donors or international organizations.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Collective Security Treaty Organization performs a responsible role in providing security in the region. The geographical location of CSTO member States — in immediate proximity to Afghanistan on the one hand and to Europe on the other — makes clear the organization's role as an important factor for stability in the region.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): Peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan are vital — most of all for the long-suffering people of that unique country, but also for Pakistan and, indeed, for the international community.

Two years ago, prospects for success in Afghanistan appeared to be bright. Indeed, much had been achieved: the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections, the adoption of the Constitution and other benchmarks of the Bonn process, revived economic activity, the rise of trade and the return of many refugees. Today, however, perceptions of Afghanistan's prospects are considerably gloomier.

The Secretary-General's report on Afghanistan, issued in September, analyses the various facets of the current situation in Afghanistan. We agree with most of the analyses and assessments.

Today, as in the past 26 years of Afghanistan's history, the central issue is peace and security. There is good reason to be concerned about the growing violence across the country, especially the revived insurgency in the south and south-east of Afghanistan and its possible extension to other parts of the country.

There are multiple and interlinked causes of the growing insecurity and insurgency in Afghanistan: the absence of good governance and pervasive corruption, fed in part by the drug economy; the political alienation in large parts of the country, especially in the Pashtun majority provinces; the rise of the drug economy and associated criminal gangs, often posing as Taliban insurgents; the resurgence of the Taliban, especially in the south and south-east; the failure to deliver economic and social development, again especially in the south and south-east; and the negative

fallout of indiscriminate military and air operations and collateral civilian casualties.

It is essential to focus on addressing each of these causes of the deteriorating environment in Afghanistan through a clear and comprehensive strategy.

Pakistan has a vital and strategic interest in ensuring peace, stability and progress in Afghanistan. Indeed, the destinies of our two nations are inextricably interlinked. Insecurity in Afghanistan causes insecurity in our Western frontier regions. Insecurity in Afghanistan obstructs our objective of creating trade and energy links with Central Asia and beyond. Pakistan has spared no effort, and will spare no effort, to contribute to stability and peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has committed \$250 million to assist Afghanistan's development. So far \$110 million has been spent. Our bilateral trade has grown exponentially, to more than \$1.4 billion last year, and is rising. Over 60,000 Pakistanis are employed in the implementation of various development projects in Afghanistan. Afghans are enrolled in various training institutions in Pakistan. Our leaders exchange visits frequently. As brothers, we often talk frankly and openly to each other, and I will do so today.

There are, of course, certain circles and some countries in our region that do not desire to see the creation of the close friendship and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan that geography, history, faith and ethnicity dictate. For them, and for some others, it is convenient to externalize the causes of Afghanistan's current problems, especially the resurgence of the Taliban. Let me emphasize that the problems are within Afghanistan. The Taliban is an Afghan phenomenon. The Government of Afghanistan should accept its responsibility rather than transfer blame onto Pakistan or others.

The Secretary-General's report rightly notes in paragraph 5 that the insurgency is being conducted by "Afghans operating inside Afghanistan's borders." In paragraph 6, it identifies five "distinct leadership centres" of the insurgency, all located within Afghanistan. According to paragraph 9, the "foot soldiers of the insurgency are Afghans recruited within Afghanistan".

There are, of course, some elements of the Taliban and their sympathizers who crossed over into

Pakistan following the post-9/11 military intervention by the United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan and melded with the 3 million Afghan refugees who had been in Pakistan for the past 25 years.

Pakistan has made every effort to prevent cross-border movement by Taliban militants and by other terrorists across the mountainous 1,800-mile border. We have conducted more than 80 operations against known locations of terrorists and militants. We have lost over 600 personnel in those operations. Pakistan has deployed more than 80,000 troops in our frontier regions and along our border. We coordinate operations with the coalition and Afghan forces on a continuous basis, including through the Tripartite Commission. We have proposed to fence and mine selective sections of the border to prevent cross-border movement. We have long requested equipment and technical capabilities to enhance our capacity for surveillance, detection and interdiction. We trust that these will be finally provided to us.

We therefore resent assertions that question our sincerity or intentions. Preventing the cross-border movement of terrorists or Taliban militants is a joint responsibility shared by Afghanistan, Pakistan and the coalition forces. While we have deployed 80,000 troops on the border, there is no matching deployment on the other side. Pakistan has 97 army posts on the border, as compared to three NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) posts and 21 Afghan army posts, lightly manned and of dubious capacity. Pakistan therefore cannot accept the onus of controlling that long and difficult border. The coalition forces and the Afghans should assume an equal responsibility.

Similarly, loose talk about "sanctuaries" ignores the reality that there are vast tracts of territory in Afghanistan which are outside Government or coalition control and serve as sanctuaries for the insurgency. Their elimination should be a priority for the Government of Afghanistan and the Coalition forces, instead of seeking to excuse their incapacity by pointing fingers across the border.

There are certainly Taliban militants and sympathizers among the 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. We have proposed that the refugee camps close to the border be relocated within Afghanistan's territory. We urge the Government of Afghanistan to

accept that proposal and to cooperate in implementing it.

We also plan to repatriate all the Afghan refugees over the next three years. That should obviate the problem of cross-border movement and allegations about sanctuaries and *shuras*.

The lessons of history, especially Afghan history, dictate that military force cannot offer the answer to the problems of alienation and insurgency. A comprehensive strategy comprising military, political and economic elements can be more successful. That will require a painstaking process of reconciliation and reconstruction, especially in the regions afflicted by the insurgency and violence. Reconciliation will involve opening the doors to those who feel that they have been excluded from political participation, power and progress. Tribal leaders and other traditional sources of influence should be incorporated into the reconciliation and reconstruction process. The aim should be to strengthen the peacemakers and to neutralize the troublemakers.

A cessation of hostilities in each region would enable the implementation of programmes for reconstruction and development, especially in the South and South-East of Afghanistan, where there has been virtually no development activity so far. President Musharraf has proposed the implementation of a \$4-5 billion "Marshall Plan" for the region. That is a fraction of the cost of current military operations. Infrastructure development, job creation and the provision of services will help to end the attraction of opposition and insurgency. Development is also indispensable to addressing the problems encountered in eliminating poppy cultivation and the drug economy that is feeding both corruption and the insurgency.

Pakistan has pursued the approach of reconciliation and reconstruction in the agreement concluded with tribal leaders in our North Waziristan Agency. It has led to a decline in violence and militancy. There is no basis for assertions that it has increased violent incidents in Afghanistan. On the contrary, NATO statistics show that violent incidents have since declined.

We intend to convene tribal jirgas in other parts of our frontier regions to conclude similar peace and development agreements. We believe that such agreements could be replicated on the Afghan side, especially in the South and South-East, to strengthen

the tribal and traditional leadership structures, end political alienation, cease hostilities and promote reconstruction and development. Such an agreement, we have noted, was also concluded by United Kingdom forces in Musa Qala, in Afghanistan. We are glad that this approach was endorsed at the summit meeting between Presidents Musharraf, Karzai and Bush in Washington, D.C., last September.

Five years after the military intervention by the Coalition in Afghanistan, it is time to review the situation comprehensively and objectively. We are not pursuing a war of vengeance in Afghanistan. The international community's aim in Afghanistan is to restore peace, stability and progress to a State that has been ravaged by almost three decades of conflict. We must seek success in Afghanistan through reconciliation and reconstruction, not by bombs and bullets.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for peace and security. Iceland is pleased to be a traditional co-sponsor of the draft resolution on Afghanistan. We thank Germany for preparing and facilitating the drafting of the resolution.

On the 19th of this month, Afghanistan, Sweden and Iceland celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of their entry in 1946 into the United Nations as the first three new Members after the founding of the Organization. We are mindful of that close and historical link, although the geographic distance between us is great.

Five years have now passed since the toppling of the Taliban regime, which ruled by tyranny and oppression and allowed Afghanistan to be used as a base for the export of terrorism. Since then, the international community has assisted the Afghan people in tackling the challenges facing the nation. Significant progress has been made towards building a democratic State in Afghanistan and towards the rehabilitation of the basic infrastructure of the country. The National Assembly has been operating effectively and provincial councils are now functioning in all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces.

However, as we have been hearing, serious challenges remain in Afghanistan, some of them critical. The upsurge of violence is a fundamental threat to the stability of the country. It also has grave implications for the human rights situation. The

increase in poppy cultivation is very alarming and constitutes a growing threat to national security, social stability and governmental effectiveness.

Similarly, the Secretary-General identifies corruption as a threat to Afghanistan's transition. Indeed, corruption is among the greatest obstacles to economic and social development. It undermines development by distorting the rule of law and weakening the institutional foundation on which economic growth depends. Iceland therefore would like to echo the encouragement to the Government of Afghanistan in the draft resolution before us to

"vigorously pursue its efforts to establish a more effective, accountable and transparent administration at all levels of Government leading the fight against corruption in accordance with the Afghanistan Compact" (A/61/L.25, para. 26).

We recognize the interconnected nature of those challenges and that sustainable progress is mutually reinforcing. In that context, we stress the important role that neighbouring countries can play in tackling many of the difficult issues that the Afghans face, as my colleague from Pakistan, among others, just stated.

On the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), I would like to align Iceland with the statement made by our colleague from Finland a few minutes ago on the even stronger role to be played by UNAMA in finding political and regional solutions to the challenges facing Afghanistan. In addition, I would like to echo my German colleague's statement earlier this morning that we should neither overestimate what has been achieved, nor underestimate the serious challenges ahead in Afghanistan.

Secure aviation and transport by air is essential for the International Security Assistance Force and for pilgrimage flights made by the Afghan people, as well as for humanitarian aid and reconstruction work in the area. Iceland has supported the reconstruction work in the aviation sector in Afghanistan both by providing advisers and staff at the international airport in Kabul and by preparing a transition plan for the airport. The aim of the plan is to train local staff and to provide sufficient facilities for an international standard of aviation at the airport.

Iceland has also participated in provincial reconstruction in Ghor province, the poorest area of Afghanistan, where an observation team and a development officer are situated. Recently, experts from Iceland held a two-week course for midwives and traditional birth assistants in the area, as the mortality rate for mothers and children is still very high in Afghanistan. I am also pleased to announce that Iceland will be making a contribution to the United Nations Development Programme's Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan.

Finally, the necessary work of nation-building and reconstruction in Afghanistan continues. The long list of sponsors of the draft resolution before us is a testament to the commitment and solidarity of the international community with regard to the Afghan Government and its people. Iceland will continue to be committed to making its contribution to establishing security in Afghanistan and to the country's reconstruction.

Mr. Al-Nuaimi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (A/61/326), which refers in detail to the efforts undertaken by the United Nations and its personnel to implement the humanitarian missions entrusted to them by General Assembly resolutions 60/32 A and B and Security Council resolution 1662 (2006). We also commend the efforts of Mr. Tom Koenigs, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, aimed at reconstruction and restoring security and stability in the country, as well as the efforts of the Security Council in supporting the Afghan Government and confronting the difficulties that it is facing. The Council recently sent a mission to Afghanistan to assess progress in the areas of counter-narcotics, disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating illegal armed groups, strengthening and improving the public sector and the judiciary, promoting human rights and the rule of law and stabilizing the country following a period of confrontation with Taliban fighters.

Successive wars over more than 20 years have had a severe impact on all aspects of life in Afghanistan, causing significant loss of human life and destruction of the infrastructures of water, electricity, transport, communications, education and health services and systems; it has also led to the collapse of the financial and banking systems and the deterioration of agricultural infrastructure. All of that has caused

severe problems in basic food resources for the population.

Therefore, all reconstruction programmes must be carried out as a top priority in order to help meet the basic needs of the population and to enable refugees and displaced persons to return to their cities and villages. Reconstruction activities will also support efforts to achieve security and stability in Afghanistan in particular and in the region as a whole.

Kuwait emphasizes that it is essential that the members of the international community honour their commitments to assist Afghanistan in addressing and overcoming the challenges confronting it, especially in the area of security, by combating terrorist acts and bringing those responsible for such acts to justice. Kuwait categorically condemns all terrorist attacks committed against Afghanistan. We share the Secretary-General's fears concerning the violent insurgency that is raging in two thirds of the country, which gravely threatens the political transitional period. Therefore, the leadership of the insurgency must be dealt with through severe and firm measures in enforcing the rule of law. It is also essential to strengthen the Government's capacity to provide security and other basic services as well as development guarantees to reduce the population's rising frustration at the slow pace of improvements in their living conditions.

The State of Kuwait welcomes the expansion to the southern part of Afghanistan of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). We urge Member States to continue to increase their support for ISAF so that it can be deployed throughout the country. We support the Afghan Government's counter-narcotics efforts, and we appeal to the international community to support the poppy eradication programme there. We stress that it is essential to undertake more robust measures against poppy farmers and the authorities who protect them, so that a more effective rural agricultural development strategy can be established.

The State of Kuwait has made contributions to reconstruction and to rebuilding the infrastructure's in Afghanistan. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has loaned \$30 million to fulfil the commitments undertaken by Kuwait at the donor conference held in Tokyo. Of that amount, \$15 million has been allocated for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the road from Kandahar to Spin

Boldak, with the other \$15 million allocated for the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. The Kuwait Red Crescent Society has donated more than \$6.5 million since 2000, and a number of other associations and charities continue to provide assistance.

Finally, we hope that the United Nations will continue to provide assistance to the Afghan Government in order to support peace and stability in Afghanistan. That will have a positive impact on the region and will permit a return to normal life within the international community.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to begin by extending our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and valuable reports he has presented over the past year on developments in Afghanistan. The efforts and dedication of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Tom Koenigs, as well as their colleagues in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) deserve our profound admiration and support.

Developments in Afghanistan in the past several years have provided ground for optimism. The people and Government of Afghanistan have successfully met all milestones set by the Bonn Agreement. They saw the political transition through to completion last December, when they concluded the general electoral process by inaugurating the Afghan National Assembly. Despite the enormity of the task, the Afghan people, with the help of international and regional assistance and the leadership of President Karzai, made significant progress towards rehabilitating the basic infrastructure needed to support political, economic and social development.

Despite encouraging developments since 2001, various hurdles, in particular the daunting challenges posed by terrorism and a violent insurgency, coupled with a pervasive drug economy, have placed a formidable combination of challenges before the political and economic reconstruction of the country. The trend towards instability, characterized by an upsurge in terrorist activities and violence by the Taliban and Al-Qaida in certain parts of Afghanistan, and the shocking increase in the presence of narcotics, with the insecurity and violence this has generated, are threatening to disrupt the return of the country to peace and stability.

In that respect, the three- to four-fold increase in the rate of casualties this year, as referred to by the Secretary-General in his latest report, is staggering. Likewise, the increasing number of security incidents, particularly the high number of suicide attacks, and their impact on regional developments on Afghanistan are troublesome. The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns the continued terrorist acts committed in Afghanistan and extends its full support to the efforts of the Afghan Government to improve the security situation in the country.

While it is heartening that the rest of the country, including western Afghanistan bordering on Iran, remains secure, we have no doubt that the terrorist activities and insecurity — although limited to a third of the country — pose a grave threat to the political transition nationwide and place the achievements of the Bonn process in jeopardy. Therefore, we agree with the Secretary-General that more efforts on the part of the Afghans and the international community are required to stabilize the country and reverse the path towards further insecurity.

In our view, enhancing the capability of the Afghan police and army constitutes the most effective response to the upsurge in terrorist activities and violence in certain parts of Afghanistan. In that regard, it is imperative that members of the international community spare no efforts in empowering the Afghans to address their own problems by, inter alia, intensifying efforts to improve and accelerate training and equipping the Afghan police and army. If issues such as the poor supply of equipment, weapons, food and accommodation for troops, as referred to by the Secretary-General, are addressed, we believe that the Afghan armed forces will be best placed to deal with the rampant insurgency.

Meanwhile, we believe that in combating terrorism and insecurity in Afghanistan, any actions — including contacts and talks with those responsible for insecurity and mayhem that could be wrongly interpreted as rewarding terrorists and criminals — should be avoided.

We, as a neighbouring country, are extremely concerned over the increase in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. According to findings of the opium survey conducted by the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), announced on 3 September 2006,

opium production increased from 180 tons in 2001 and 4,100 in 2005 to 6,100 tons this year. As a result, Afghanistan now accounts for 92 per cent of the total world supply of opium and its derivatives, especially heroin. We also echo the concern expressed in the report of the Secretary-General for the increase in the number of Afghan provinces where the opium poppy is cultivated — from 15 to 20 provinces in the late 1990s to 25 to 30 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces at the present time.

There is no doubt that terrorism, insecurity and drug trafficking in Afghanistan are mutually reinforcing, and terrorist groups are among the major beneficiaries of the drug money. Thus, it is imperative and indispensable for members of the international community, especially those who are at the receiving end of the narcotics trade, to adjust their counter-narcotics strategy accordingly. Equally important is an absolute need for the international community to assist the Afghan Government in implementing its national drug control policy through, inter alia, the building of institutions, elimination of the illicit poppy cultivation, reduction of demand, crop substitution, strengthening law enforcement and promoting alternative livelihoods.

Since the fight against drug trafficking is more effective and less costly along the Afghan borders, the international community should support the efforts made by Afghanistan's neighbouring States and those along the trafficking routes to curb the flow of illicit drugs.

As is well known, the Islamic Republic of Iran has, for its part, fought a costly war against heavily armed drug traffickers in the last decades and stands ready to continue that fight. For Iran to sustain its ongoing fierce fight against drug trafficking, international support, especially the cooperation of neighbouring countries, is indispensable.

Given the enormous challenges that Afghanistan is facing, it is imperative that the international community remain committed in the long term to help the Afghans in their efforts to rehabilitate their country. In that respect, the nationally owned and led Afghan Compact remains the best strategic framework for cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. My Government, as a member of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board of the Afghanistan Compact, stands ready to

contribute to the success and full realization of that initiative.

My delegation also reaffirms the central role of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including its coordination of efforts to implement the Afghanistan Compact. While commending actions taken by UNAMA, including the opening of new provincial sub-offices despite the heightened security concerns, we welcome the intention of the United Nations to consider expanding UNAMA's activities to as many as seven additional locations across the country. We agree that the expansion sends a strong message to Afghans that the United Nations will continue to help their Government to improve delivery of services, even in parts of the country that are affected by the insurgency.

Given the importance of regional cooperation to help the Afghans cope with the growing insecurity, we look forward with hope to a number of positive steps taken in the past several months with a view to enhancing cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours to more rigorously address the insecurity and terrorist threats in the south, south-east and east of Afghanistan. In that context, my Government has always been at the forefront of efforts aimed at supporting regional dialogue to combat terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, and in fostering cooperation on refugee issues.

We continue to have an enormous stake in the success of the Afghan people and have therefore extended unreserved cooperation to them and their representatives throughout the process. Out of \$560 million for reconstruction assistance for Afghanistan pledged by Iran at the Tokyo Conference — which was the highest pledge in terms of per capita income of donor countries — we have thus far spent \$270 million on mutually agreed projects in the areas of infrastructure, technical and educational services and other assistance, both financial and in kind.

During his latest visit to Iran, last May, President Karzai of Afghanistan, heading a group of nine cabinet ministers and several provincial governors, conferred with the highest ranking Iranian officials and discussed the expansion of relations in areas of mutual interest. During the visit, seven agreements and memorandums of understanding on exchange of prisoners, extradition of criminals, promotion of investment and construction of the Khwaf-Herat railway, as well as on cooperation

in the cultural, judicial and economic fields, were signed.

Both countries particularly stressed the need for further cooperation in ensuring the voluntary return of Afghan refugees from Iran with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Having hosted almost 3 million Afghan refugees for about three decades, incurring huge costs in the process, the Iranian Government expects more cooperation on the part of the international community and the Afghan Government in the process of the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Despite actions taken in the past several years, that process has not yet made satisfactory progress.

Before concluding, I would like to extend our appreciation to the German delegation for its excellent work in preparing and finalizing draft resolution A/61/L.25.

Mr. Normandin (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Canada welcomes draft resolution A/61/L.25 on Afghanistan. We were pleased to participate, in a cooperative and collegial spirit, in the preparation of the draft resolution and are pleased to advocate its adoption. Canada also appreciates this opportunity to address the General Assembly on the situation in Afghanistan.

We have joined 36 other nations in a mission authorized by the United Nations and under the command of NATO, in the efforts to stabilize the country. And we are among more than 60 countries contributing to the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Canadian diplomats, representatives of our international development agency, civilian police and 2,500 members of our military forces are on the front lines doing essential work towards the future of Afghanistan. We are the fifth largest bilateral donor, having committed \$1 billion over 10 years for the reconstruction and development of the country. We strongly believe that being a responsible global actor means being firmly engaged on the ground.

Since last year, we have witnessed important signs of progress in Afghanistan. January saw the successful conclusion of the Bonn process, included the adoption of Afghanistan's new constitution in 2002 and the holding of nationwide presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections in 2004 and

2005. The Afghan Government and the international community agreed to the Afghanistan Compact, a shared comprehensive, five-year strategy incorporating security, governance and development benchmarks. Moreover, the Afghan Government developed an action plan to meet those benchmarks: the interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Throughout Afghanistan we see major progress in the emergence of the institutions of governance, including the parliament, the Supreme Court and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, providing Afghans with the foundations of statehood. Each of these signs of progress — unthinkable only a few years ago — reflect the will and fortitude of the Afghan people, as well as the firm commitment and determined action of the international community. This progress is encouraging, but it is only the beginning.

We thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report on the situation in Afghanistan (A/61/326), and we welcome his frank and forthright assessment of the emerging security challenges in the country's southern and eastern provinces. As the report of the Secretary-General noted, we have reached a watershed in Afghanistan. The country's successful transition to a peaceful democracy is not yet guaranteed. In order to overcome these growing challenges, the Government of Afghanistan, its regional partners and the rest of the international community must strengthen their collective efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and support its democratic transition.

(*spoke in English*)

We can all do more, and we must all do more. First and foremost, the Government of Afghanistan must lead the way. And it must lead by example. In his recent report, the Secretary-General highlighted Government corruption, particularly within the police and the judiciary, as a primary grievance driving the insurgency. There is no place for corruption within the ranks of Afghanistan's national, provincial or local institutions of governance.

The Afghan people expect — and they deserve — an effective, accountable and transparent Government. They will not support a Government that does not support them. Only good governance can foster the conditions necessary for establishing security, promoting the rule of law, protecting human rights and encouraging economic development. While a great deal

remains to be done, we welcome the Afghan Government's most recent efforts to address corruption, and we stand ready to support their work.

Afghanistan's neighbours also have a critical role to play. Poverty and instability know no borders. High-level regional engagement and cooperation at all levels are crucial to addressing transnational terrorism, the narcotics trade and pressing refugee issues. Canada calls upon States in the region, including Afghanistan's closest neighbours, to step up efforts to prevent the cross-border movement of insurgents, to stem the burgeoning trade in narcotics and to find interim solutions for Afghan refugees living inside their borders. Afghanistan and its neighbours must stand together for the security and prosperity of all.

In that respect, we welcome the second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, which took place in New Delhi, India, two weeks ago. Only regional cooperation can build roads and regional arteries linking Afghanistan to regional trade networks. Only regional cooperation can facilitate energy generation and trade across the continent. And only regional cooperation can provide for the exchange of the resources, people and ideas necessary for private sector growth. There is no independent State in the world that can flourish without that degree of cooperation and support.

The international community — Canada included — must also work harder. The United Nations, as the primary representative of the international community responsible for the implementation of the Compact, should remain at the centre of these efforts. Afghanistan is the largest special political mission of the United Nations. The success of the mission is vital for the safety, livelihood and very future of the Afghan people. To that end, we must provide the United Nations — from New York to Kabul, Kandahar and beyond — with the support, capacity and space it requires to show leadership and play its essential coordination role.

Mr. Hill (Australia): Australia is committed to working with the people and the Government of Afghanistan, as well as the international community, to help build a stable, secure and democratic future for that country. This is no easy task and will need the long-term commitment of the international community. It will also require strong leadership from the Karzai Government.

Australia stresses the importance of reconstruction and development in helping Afghanistan rebuild its destroyed infrastructure and overcome the problems reflected in its sobering social indicators, such as a life expectancy of only 46 years and an appalling literacy rate, which is one of the lowest in the world. That is central to winning the support of the long-suffering Afghan population. Again, this will require commitment, resourcefulness and staying power on the part of the international community. Leadership by the Government of Afghanistan will also be essential.

Counter-narcotics is central to the international community's enterprise in Afghanistan, and we call for effective international and domestic action to combat the recent increase in the cultivation and production of and the traffic in narcotic drugs, as outlined in the 2006 Afghanistan opium survey of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

We stress the importance of institution-building in Afghanistan, including security sector reform and capacity-building within the security sector. Civil society and the institutions of good governance must also be strengthened. These are core requirements for long-term stability in Afghanistan and relate to areas in which the international community can usefully apply lessons learned elsewhere.

Another critical factor in securing peace in Afghanistan is the role of Afghanistan's neighbours, including in combating the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist elements. We call on all States in Afghanistan's region to cooperate with the Government in Kabul and the rest of the international community in building a strong, united and democratic Afghanistan.

These are substantial challenges which demand the continuation of the close cooperation demonstrated by the international community since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, through the Bonn Agreement and, more recently, the adoption of the Afghanistan Compact of 2006. Despite the challenges, Afghanistan is an outstanding example of broad-based cooperation among the international community aimed at promoting peace and security. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) consists of some 32,000 troops from 37 countries. The United Nations, of course, has also been heavily involved in Afghanistan, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1386 (2001) and subsequent resolutions, and the

commitment of those on the ground is particularly commended.

Australia is contributing to the international military effort in Afghanistan. We have deployed a reconstruction task force of about 370 troops as part of a Netherlands-led provincial reconstruction team to Oruzgan province for two years under ISAF.

We have two Chinook helicopters, supporting a further 110 troops, providing much needed aeromedical evacuation, air mobility and logistical support to ISAF. We have contributed special forces to coalition military operations in Afghanistan on two separate occasions since 2001. We have fully disbursed our 2001 aid commitment of \$110 million. At the London Conference in 2006, Australia further committed \$55 million in development assistance to Afghanistan through June 2007 as part of an indicative \$150 million in development assistance over the next five years. We also recently opened the first Australian Embassy in Kabul.

The people of Afghanistan are working to achieve stability, peace and democracy after many years of violence, extremism and devastation. The path ahead will be long and challenging. But the people of Afghanistan will not have to face those challenges alone. Australia, along with many others in the international community, recognizes that by working to build security and an economic future for Afghanistan, we are not only demonstrating solidarity with the Afghan people but also advancing our own peace and security.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): My delegation appreciates the common efforts of the Afghan Government and the international community to achieve peace and development in Afghanistan. Indeed, after the successful completion of the Bonn process last year, Afghanistan has been making steady progress towards peace and reconstruction.

My delegation welcomes all positive developments in that direction. The Afghan National Assembly and provincial councils have begun to function properly. The reform of the security sector is also well under way. The reintegration process for ex-combatants has been completed, while a programme has been launched to disband illegal armed groups. The Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy was formulated to set out development priorities, and the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund has become

operational. Furthermore, in London earlier this year, the strong international partnership for Afghanistan was reaffirmed by the Afghanistan Compact, through which the international community will continue to support Afghanistan for the next five years and beyond.

Nevertheless, despite those achievements and renewed commitments, Afghanistan is still faced with a number of challenges that must be overcome. Among those challenges, I would like to elaborate on those that we believe deserve the highest priority and the most urgent and decisive response.

First, we note with deep concern the deteriorating security situation in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. Indeed, this provincial insecurity not only threatens national security overall, but also has a serious impact on the prospects for national development, as well as on the human rights situation. In this regard, we welcome the recent expansion of the presence of the International Security Assistance Force into southern and eastern Afghanistan.

In order to deal with this insecurity, the programme to disband illegal armed groups must be accelerated. At the same time, the Afghan national army and police forces must be strengthened, particularly in terms of their equipment and operational capabilities. Another important factor will be enhanced cooperation and coordination between the central and provincial governments, so that law enforcement at the local level will be more effective.

A second issue with far-reaching effects throughout Afghanistan concerns the narcotics industry. My delegation welcomes the continuing counter-narcotics efforts of the Afghan Government and its achievements so far. Nevertheless, after a significant decrease in opium cultivation last year, we have seen a new increase this year. We call on the Afghan Government, in cooperation with the international community and particularly with its neighbours, to strengthen its narcotics eradication programme. At the same time, rural development projects are needed so that people living in rural areas will have viable economic alternatives to cultivating opium for survival.

Thirdly, public administration reform will be a driving force in implementing the Afghanistan Compact and other development policies. Our own development experience taught us that government policies are more effective when strong government

leadership is combined with active community participation. More effective, accountable and transparent public administration, including within the justice sector, will not only reduce corruption, but will also encourage democratic governance, thus facilitating people's participation in government policies.

The Republic of Korea has actively joined in global efforts to support Afghanistan. Since 2002, we have continued to provide military personnel to support reconstruction and stability in Afghanistan. Furthermore, building upon our contribution of approximately \$60 million over the past four years, the Republic of Korea is planning to support the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact by earmarking an additional \$20 million dollars for the next three years. The new fund will focus on human resources development, public administration, agriculture and rural development. As a co-sponsor of the draft resolution on Afghanistan before us, the Republic of Korea once again pledges to renew our unwavering support for the people of Afghanistan in their pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous future.

Mr. Oegroseno (Indonesia): We thank the Secretary-General for presenting his comprehensive report on the crucial topic of "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for peace and security" (A/61/326). Indeed, what happens in Afghanistan has grave consequences not only for its people but also for the region and the world.

While the Government of Afghanistan should try its utmost to consolidate the country's position, it is also a real test for the international community, in owning up to its responsibility for Afghanistan. There will always be a myriad of important international issues, but none should detract from the attention that Afghanistan deserves. It is incumbent upon the concerned States and the relevant international organizations to fully implement their commitments in assisting the Government of Afghanistan to tackle the many substantial security and developmental challenges confronting its people.

Indonesia is deeply disturbed by the upsurge of violence throughout Afghanistan, particularly in the southern and eastern part of the country. The deterioration of the security situation, including the proliferation of suicide bombings and the resurgence of Taliban and foreign fighters, is hampering the reconstruction work.

It is important to continue to institute robust military and law enforcement measures in that regard. However, it is hard to see that the use of force *per se* would lessen the threat of insecurity and attacks against the Government and the people. If I may quote from paragraph 9 of the Secretary-General's report, "The foot soldiers of the insurgency ... are driven by poverty, poor education and general disenchantment with their place in society."

The paramount task of integrating various groups in the Afghan society should continue through concrete steps in social and economic development. Greater emphasis on national reconciliation is also important, with ongoing governmental initiatives such as the "Strengthening Peace" programme.

It is sad to realize that 2.5 million Afghans are facing food scarcity due to the severe drought. It is also unfortunate that less than half of the \$76 million joint Government-United Nations appeal launched on 25 July this year has been funded. We must open our coffers so people will not lose their lives. In the long term, only a comprehensive approach, with socio-economic development as its cornerstone, will lead to the improvement of conditions for the Afghan people.

A major negative factor remaining for the society is narcotics. We are deeply concerned that opium cultivation has increased by 59 per cent this year, which is higher than under the previous Government. While the governmental anti-narcotics crackdown is necessary, a law enforcement approach cannot solve the issue by itself. People need alternative and sustainable income-generating activities with the provision of a critical mass of infrastructure that will facilitate economic progress.

The international community must increase its support for the effective implementation of the Afghanistan Compact and the interim National Development Strategy with the full ownership of the Government. In that context, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board should focus further on implementing plans with a priority on helping to build local capacities in the various State and non-State institutions.

Furthermore, the coordination role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should be strengthened. We welcome the expansion of UNAMA activities into more locations throughout

Afghanistan, in the midst of the difficulties and insecure situation on the ground.

Bilateral and regional cooperation in various areas of nation-building is of the essence. The different initiatives in that respect, such as those of the Tripartite Commission and the high-level regional summits held in Shanghai and Tajikistan earlier this year, as well as the second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan held recently in New Delhi, are positive steps and need to be further strengthened.

My delegation is pleased that the democratization process continues, and that the lower house and upper house are functioning to solidify the democracy. We commend the confirmation process for the justices of the Supreme Court, and we hope that there will be further progress in the requisite capacity-building of the justice system. That would contribute to the further establishment of the rule of law in the country.

It is also critical that international humanitarian law is observed, local culture and customs are respected and utmost care is taken not to harm civilians in the military operations. There has been tangible progress in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process. However, the intensification of the insurgency, unfortunately, is being used by some as a reason to resist DDR. That underscores again how important it is for all entities, both inside and outside Afghanistan, to act in a positive manner to help facilitate the efforts of the Government in providing a sense of security to the public.

Indonesia reiterates its full support to our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. We urge the international community to step up its assistance to the Afghan people and to fully support the Government of Afghanistan in implementing its comprehensive policy with a long-term view.

As we did last year, we are pleased once again to be a sponsor of the draft resolution, as contained in the document A/61/L.25, and hope that it can be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): The deliberations on this agenda item are very timely, especially since Afghanistan is at crossroads as regards its democratic future, security and governance.

As I stated in my briefing on the Security Council mission to Afghanistan that took place recently, the Afghan partnership that began in Bonn in 2001 — and

which continued through the Tokyo International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in 2002 and the London Conference in January this year, which agreed on the Afghanistan Compact — is still on track. Over the past several years, Afghanistan has achieved a great deal in developing its democratic institutions and tackling many difficult challenges in its post-conflict nation-building efforts. The United Nations and the rest of the international community have played an indispensable role in the process and in assisting the fledgling Government to deal with problems facing the country.

It is also a harsh reality that Afghanistan continues to face serious challenges in the areas of governance, maintaining security and stability in the countryside and in reconstruction and development efforts. There is fragility in the central and provincial administration. The immediate key problems include the rise and gradual spread of the Taliban-led insurgency and attacks by terrorists and extremists, pernicious illegal drug production and trafficking, weak Government institutions — in particular in the security sector and other civil service areas — lack of rule of law, and corruption. Against such a backdrop, we would like to stress three points that we consider to be of particular importance in moving the international partnership with Afghanistan forward.

The first point is the importance of Afghans fully owning the process themselves. That is increasingly being achieved as it relates to building institutions and resolving problems. In fact, Afghanistan had to start on its reconstruction not from zero but from below zero — from deep minuses following years of conflict and destruction of the country. Against that background, we highly commend the efforts and achievements made so far by the Afghan Government and people. In our view, Afghan ownership has played an essential part in the process thus far. That should be encouraged and strengthened.

In that regard, Japan is of the view that the Afghanistan Compact remains the most appropriate strategic framework for cooperation between the Afghan Government and the international community. Head-on implementation of the Compact is of critical importance now. It is essential that Afghans, who own and lead the Compact, keep their commitment to the Compact in order to address issues such as fighting corruption and impunity, establishing the rule of law and building a culture of respect for human rights,

especially women's rights. The international community, for its part, needs to remain strongly committed to assisting Afghanistan in every way possible, to ensure that the gains made so far and the enormous effort invested will not be wasted. In that connection, we emphasize that the international community should continue to give its full support to the Afghan Compact and its implementation mechanism, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board. Japan very much expects that the Afghan Compact will move from process and planning to action and implementation.

Secondly, we wish to express our concern over the security situation in Afghanistan, which remains precarious throughout the country. That also poses a serious threat to the nation-building process. Various international support efforts are ongoing. For its part, Japan — firmly determined to prevent the country from becoming a hotbed of terrorism and a haven for extremists — has assisted Afghanistan by hosting, as a follow-up to the 2002 International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, a second Tokyo conference in July on the consolidation of peace in Afghanistan. We have also extended official development assistance amounting to approximately \$1.1 billion, covering security sector reform — in particular for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the disbandment of illegal armed groups — as well as comprehensive rural development and human resource development programmes and projects. In addition, Japan decided last month to continue the maritime support activities conducted by Japan's Maritime Self-defence Force ships engaged in counter-terrorism operations in the Indian Ocean.

We stress that the primary responsibility for ensuring security lies with the Afghans themselves. But while there remains an urgent need for outside support in the security sector, the international community should continue to make support available as much as possible.

Thirdly, let me say a word about the importance of regional cooperation. The reconstruction of Afghanistan not only benefits Afghanistan, it also benefits neighbouring countries and the region as a whole. Regional cooperation between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries should therefore be encouraged. Based on that belief, Japan organized at Tokyo last June the second Foreign Ministers meeting of the Central Asia Plus Japan dialogue. Japan invited

Afghanistan to participate as a partner in that forum for the first time.

Similarly, Japan has supported the construction of key infrastructure projects to ensure smoother movement of people and goods inside the country. That will in turn contribute to promoting greater regional movement of goods and people between Afghanistan and countries in Central and South Asia, as well as to greater regional cooperation over time. Those projects include the major artery of the ring road and the Kabul International Airport, as well as roads connecting Afghanistan and surrounding countries.

As part of support for counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics measures in Afghanistan, Japan has provided approximately \$11.5 million dollars for counter-narcotics measures and for training in customs control. Moreover, Japan intends to actively support training in border control and management between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Finally, we wish to express our great appreciation to the delegation of Germany for submitting the draft resolution. As a sponsor of the draft resolution, we strongly support it.

Mr. Siegel (United States of America): The United States would like to express its appreciation for the imminent adoption of draft resolution A/61/L.25, on the situation in Afghanistan. We would like to thank Germany and the other sponsors for their efforts. The adoption of the resolution by consensus will demonstrate the overwhelming support of the international community for our joint endeavour in Afghanistan. The draft resolution is a comprehensive document that will help guide the actions of the international community in Afghanistan.

We appreciate the assistance Member States have given to improve security, democracy, governance and economic and social development in Afghanistan, as well as assistance to counter-narcotics and to support regional stability efforts. Of particular importance, the draft resolution reaffirms the international community's resolve to address the threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups at this critical juncture.

The United States is the largest donor, as well as the largest troop contributor, to Afghanistan. We reaffirm our commitment to work with the United

Nations, International Security Assistance Force partners and the Afghan Government towards security, democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Mr. Sen (India): I would like to thank the President for scheduling today's discussion on the situation in Afghanistan. This meeting is a valuable opportunity to discuss a vitally important issue in the most representative organ of the United Nations, the General Assembly. We would also wish to place on record our appreciation for the constructive efforts and meticulous diligence of the German delegation in producing a more compact, concise and user-friendly draft resolution for adoption this year. We are happy to encourage its adoption by consensus.

The importance of today's discussion on Afghanistan stems from the centrality of the partnership between the Afghan people and the international community in ensuring lasting security, long-term employment-led development and humanitarian relief in the country. After all, that is the essence of the International Compact on Afghanistan. In discussing this crucial issue today, we also recognize the interconnected nature of the world's responsibility in Afghanistan, given its location at the strategic crossroads that link West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia.

I do not propose to elaborate at length on well-known facts about the situation in Afghanistan, not only because today's draft resolution speaks for itself but also because the report (A/61/326) of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan provides a detailed reflection of the facts on the ground. I would, however, like to draw attention to the recently-concluded second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, which India had the honour to host jointly with our brothers from Afghanistan in New Delhi 10 days ago. Our remarks today will be in keeping with the future-oriented vision that is outlined in the documents that emerged from that important conference.

The first point that I would like to touch upon is that, in our collective efforts to assist the Afghan people in their effort to put the last decades of strife and privation behind them, we need to focus on some of the positive achievements of the past few years. It is almost five years since the Taliban regime was removed from power. We must recognize that, in that brief period, the pace of democratic change in

Afghanistan has, by any standard, been remarkable. Today most of the accepted milestones of modern democracy are visible in Afghanistan. The report of a well-known think tank has correctly concluded that, if handled rightly, the National Assembly has the potential to play a vital role in stabilizing Afghanistan, entrenching pluralism, institutionalizing political competition and giving voice to the country's diverse population.

Those landmark achievements have been attained in the face of adversity and despite serious challenges. That is not to deny the need for further efforts, or to suggest that we may now indulge in the luxury of complacency — far from it. We recognize, as does today's draft resolution, the need for further efforts to give representation to all segments of Afghan society, including women. However, we would like to pay tribute to the courage and perseverance of the people and the foresight of the leadership of Afghanistan for their achievements so far. Equally, we commend the Afghan people for determinedly pursuing the complex task of building a modern State on the shattered fragments of decades of war and strife.

Secondly, and crucially, we believe that much more needs to be done to reverse the deteriorating security situation. This urgency is reflected both in the Secretary-General's report and in today's draft resolution. But language alone cannot capture the criticality of this effort. While we commend the efforts made thus far, intensified regional and international efforts to deal with the problem of a resurgent Taliban, an Al-Qaida insurrection and their nexus with drug traffickers is essential. Sadly, all of us know of this only too well, from the attacks on security forces to the tragic killing of humanitarian workers. The cost of tolerating such an insurrection is infinitely higher for each and every one of us than any costs we might collectively bear in putting it down firmly and finally.

Making deals with the Taliban will bring neither peace nor security. The people support democratization. A long-term solution to the problems of the Afghan people is therefore to be found in a judicious mixture of using force against extremist elements and providing credible and sustained development opportunities to build upon the growing constituency for peace and development, not only in Afghanistan but across the region.

Inaugurating the second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described the violence in southern and south-eastern Afghanistan, which undermines the security of Afghanistan and the development effort, as a challenge that is a collective responsibility. The swamp of terrorist insurgency cannot be drained until the stream feeding the swamp dries up, or is at least reduced to a trickle. An important regional and international duty that devolves upon all of us is to act firmly and decisively to eliminate the agencies of terror and their backers, prevent incitement to terror and interdict the sources that provide terrorist groups with arms and finances. That, I might add, is a responsibility that we have all undertaken to bear, not only in the World Summit Outcome Document but also in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted at the previous General Assembly session.

I would also like to point out that the New Delhi declaration of the second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan notes that a

"strategy for development for Afghanistan which is based on cooperation with regional countries creates significant possibilities for reducing poverty and for achieving the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks and Millennium Development Goals in the entire region".

Towards that end, it outlines a number of useful suggestions for the countries of the region to coordinate policies for exploiting shared resources such as water, agriculture and energy, to develop capacity-building programmes, to expand trade and transport linkages, to design and build appropriate and practical regional projects and even to develop policies to counter the cultivation of narcotics and drug smuggling.

The Asian Development Bank has already been asked to undertake a study on regional integration strategies, and will share key findings at the next Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. The second Conference also led to decisions from participating regional States to put in place a number of practical programmes that would give substance to the regional process of assisting Afghanistan, apart from giving that objective a higher level of the necessary political commitment. In such

measures lie the key to unlocking the vast latent potential of the land and people of Afghanistan.

India's support for a sovereign, stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan is consistent and well-known. We see a resurgent, stable, sovereign and peaceful Afghanistan as an essential element in the growing webs of regional cooperation that are binding our world, but also a process that reclaims for the people of Afghanistan their rightful place in our collective future. Afghanistan's entry into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, at its last summit in Dhaka, was a manifestation of that process. We believe that Afghanistan can, and must be, provided with the means to re-establish itself as the crossroads of Asia and as one of the future transport hubs and energy bridges of our region.

In conclusion, let me also reiterate India's own unwavering commitment to assist with the reconstruction of Afghanistan. We have extended financial assistance totalling over \$600 million to fund infrastructure projects and to strengthen the national budget process. Our involvement in project assistance spans the gamut of activity from basic infrastructure such as roads, power generation, dams and telecommunications systems to community-based small-scale projects, which have a short gestation period and provide a direct, rapid and visible impact on community life.

However, we also realize the need to transcend funding, and have been working to provide the Afghan people with the tools to help themselves through training programmes and appropriate technologies, both in India and in Afghanistan. Tragic and heinous attacks on our nationals involved in humanitarian assistance programmes will not deter us from that effort. The Prime Minister of India said in New Delhi last week that India would do whatever it was called upon to do to strengthen democracy and promote development in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Singh described that as a solemn commitment to a neighbour, to a trusted friend, to a great people. India remains firmly committed to helping the Afghan people rebuild their nation and create new opportunities for the future.

Mr. Ilkin (Turkey): Turkey aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. However, given Turkey's special ties with Afghanistan, I want to make a few additional remarks in order to reaffirm our

support for the ongoing reconstruction process in that country.

It has been more than four years since we turned a new page in Afghanistan. The progress achieved to date is truly substantial. What has been accomplished by the Afghan people is indeed commendable. However, there are still major challenges ahead. We should therefore continue to act with full resolve to contribute to the creation of a democratic, secure and stable Afghanistan.

In that regard, the draft resolution before us strikes a good balance between what has been achieved and what still remains to be done in Afghanistan. We thank Germany for facilitating the preparation of the draft resolution, which contains all the elements of a check-list that can guide us towards our ultimate goal. Given their interlinked nature, we can only achieve all those objectives through a comprehensive process. In that context, we fully support the Compact process, which was initiated less than a year ago along these lines. It has already started yielding results. We remain committed to its successful completion.

In that regard, the year ahead of us is critical if we are to be able to make good on our commitments. Not only do we have to consolidate the initial successes of the Compact process and extend it country-wide, but we should also stand firmly against the re-emerging forces of darkness and instability that try to hold back Afghanistan from its march towards progress and prosperity. In particular, the increase in drug trafficking and the worsening of the security situation in the south and east of the country require our immediate and resolute attention and action.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that Turkey will continue to play a supportive role vis-à-vis the people of Afghanistan. We believe in their great potential, and feel that they deserve the full support of all of us in their endeavour to carry Afghanistan forward. That is why, after leading the International Security Assistance Force twice in the last three years, we still maintain a large contingent in the country as part of NATO forces. We have also recently launched, and assumed full responsibility for, a provincial reconstruction team in Vardak province, north of Kabul.

In conclusion, we will continue to assist our Afghan brethren in every way we can. We are therefore pleased to be one of the sponsors of today's draft

resolution, which is precisely designed for that purpose.

Ms. Graham (New Zealand): New Zealand is pleased to be a sponsor of this year's draft resolution on the situation in Afghanistan.

Let me begin by congratulating the Government and people of Afghanistan on the important steps that have been taken in recent years, including elections for the presidency and the National Assembly and the inauguration of vital democratic institutions. Those are rightly heralded as major achievements on Afghanistan's path towards stable democracy since the signing of the Bonn Agreement. We acknowledge in particular the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, which was recognized at Bonn as an institution critical to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Afghan people.

Security and economic development, evidenced by an improvement in the quality of daily life for the Afghan people, is the key to securing the legitimacy and authority of the Afghan Government and the basis for long-term peace and stability. There is encouraging evidence of gains leading to a revival of economic activity, in particular in those parts of Afghanistan that have seen improvements in stability and governance. In that context, New Zealand acknowledges the value of local mechanisms in achieving regional solutions, and the investment of effort and commitment by Afghan people, often under difficult and trying circumstances, in making those initiatives work.

But the deterioration of the overall security environment, which impinges on the delivery of aid and on economic growth, is of real concern. The upsurge in violence, coupled with a major resurgence of Taliban military and terrorist activity, in particular in southern Afghanistan, is at an unprecedented level. New Zealand, as a contributor to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, commends the Government of Afghanistan and the major ISAF contributors for their efforts towards achieving stability and security throughout Afghanistan. We add our voice to calls on the Government of Afghanistan and international partners to remain committed to developing the capabilities of the Afghan police and military.

The unprecedented increase in opium production and illegal trafficking, which have negative effects on

stabilization initiatives, governance and the rooting out of corruption, is of further concern. It is vital that efforts to address the problem, including through the development of alternative rural livelihoods and justice sector reform, are redoubled.

New Zealand will continue to support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan in assisting with the restoration of peace and security. We maintain our commitment to reconstruction initiatives in Bamyan. We call on international donors to ensure that their contributions are closely coordinated with those of other donors, and in accordance with the Interim Afghan National Development Strategy and the Afghanistan Compact.

New Zealand recognizes that the road to success for Afghanistan is a long one. Alongside others here today, we reaffirm New Zealand's commitment to continuing to work with the Afghan people to create a safe, secure and more prosperous country.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): Norway believes that the situation in Afghanistan is a cause for deep concern. The conflict in the southern parts of the country has demonstrated the need for a change of pace in our efforts — those of the international community and those of the Government of Afghanistan. The increasing challenges have illustrated the importance of making better use of our resources in some areas, of expanding our efforts in others and of enhancing the ability of the Afghan Government to assume ownership of the development of its own country.

A comprehensive and truly nation-wide strategy is required. If we remain focused on one dimension of our work alone or on one region of the country, then the result may well be less stability, not more. Our strategy must include the security, humanitarian, development and political dimensions. The Bonn process brought about impressive achievements, and the Afghanistan Compact remains our road map. However, there is today a sense of stagnation.

In order to inject new and much needed political energy into the process, it is our view that we must address three interrelated challenges: first, improving the coordination of international assistance; secondly, enhancing our capacity-building efforts; and, thirdly, supporting President Karzai by encouraging the Afghan Government to strengthen its outreach policies and to rid itself of corruption and undesirable practices. Our work is a true partnership between the international

community and the Government of Afghanistan. Their leadership and ownership are crucial.

Let me turn to the first point, namely, improving the coordination of international assistance. Although improvements have been made, the civilian side of the international community continues to suffer from a lack of coordination. The fragmentation of our civilian efforts leads to a waste of resources. It complicates our efforts to implement a systematic development strategy under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan. We need stronger civilian leadership in order to improve the coordination of our assistance and enhance the ability of the Afghan Government to assume ownership. That would enable us to speed up the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact.

No other organization is better placed to shoulder that responsibility than the United Nations. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should be staffed and given the resources required to play that role on the ground. There is also a need to strengthen coordination between capitals and the headquarters of key organizations. To facilitate such coordination, the United Nations may consider the appointment of a special envoy for Afghanistan with the task of conducting a continuous dialogue with countries engaged in the stabilization of Afghanistan, with countries in the region and with relevant international organizations.

However, efficient coordination will be possible only if donors are prepared to be coordinated. While reliance on foreign contractors and personnel may often be inevitable, it also drives up costs, leaves less money in Afghanistan and leads to parallel structures, thereby weakening Afghan ownership and its ability to develop its own institutions. We should examine how we can channel more of our development and reconstruction assistance through Afghan institutions and organizations, in accordance with the Afghanistan Compact.

To the second point — that is, improving Afghan governance and ownership — it is our view that capacity-building remains a key to success in Afghanistan. Significant resources have been invested in the training of staff of Government institutions, the police, the judiciary and the army. Nevertheless, the instruments of law and order remain weak, ministries and provincial authorities urgently need expertise and the army lacks the capacity to conduct independent

operations. A stronger, more concerted capacity-building effort is required.

Capacity-building is also an important part of development and reconstruction. The donor community should do more to increase their use of Afghan personnel, thereby providing a capacity-building effect, which would facilitate the maintenance and sustainability of projects. The use of local manpower would stimulate economic growth and employment as well as local ownership.

Thirdly, with regard to supporting the Afghan Government, an intensified international programme to promote ownership and capacity-building must be accompanied by a determined effort by the Government of Afghanistan to reach out to its people and improve its own institutions. The Government should be encouraged to reach out to provinces, districts and villages. An intensified dialogue between the central Government and local leaders and tribal elders would be an essential means of forging loyalty between the central Government and the different parts of the country. The building of a stable Afghanistan will need to combine new institutions with traditional structures.

Let me add our concerns regarding the humanitarian situation. There are pressing humanitarian needs in Afghanistan today. Soon, 1.9 million Afghans may require food assistance due to large-scale drought. Furthermore, 20,000 displaced

families are in need of food and shelter, following the fighting in the southern provinces. A prompt response to the recent appeal by the Government and UNAMA is required. We must enable the Government to exercise leadership, and thereby demonstrate its ability to come to the assistance of its own people.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 16.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/61/L.25.

I should like to announce that, since the introduction of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors: Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jordan, Kuwait, Liberia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, San Marino, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia and Turkmenistan.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.25?

Draft resolution A/61/L.25 was adopted (resolution 61/18).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 16?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.



General Assembly

Sixty-first session

Official Records

59th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 28 November 2006, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Baja (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 155

Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade

Draft resolution (A/61/L.28)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.28.

Mrs. Ferrari (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.28 on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We are pleased that the African Group of countries has given us unconditional support and encouragement in this initiative. In addition, all members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, and many countries of Asia and the Pacific, as well as Western and Eastern Europe, have co-sponsored the draft resolution.

At the outset, I am obliged to point out and make some changes to the text, which is necessary because those changes were made after it was tabled.

First, in the last line of the fifth preambular paragraph, the words "that they" should be deleted.

The words "be deemed so" should be deleted and replaced with the words "have been so".

Next, in the second line of the ninth preambular paragraph, after the word "slavery", the words "with regard to" should be deleted and replaced with "and on".

Finally, with regard to operative paragraph 3, since the proposed international day would fall on a Sunday, we propose that the special meeting of the General Assembly be convened on 26 March 2007, instead of 25 March as noted in the text. Therefore, the date of 25 March in the first line should be deleted and replaced with 26 March 2007. In the second line, the words "on the international day for the" should be deleted and replaced with the word "in".

25 March 2007 will be a significant day for the international community. It will mark the passage of 200 years since the imperial British Parliament passed the act for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in all of its empire. The Act was to help chart the course for abolition all over the world. We acknowledge and remember with gratitude those who led the struggle for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.

Slavery and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade represent one of the low points in the history of humanity. They resulted in the forced removal of over 18 million people, over a period of some 500 years, from Africa to the new world of the Americas, including the Caribbean, the United States, Brazil and

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the Spanish Empire. There they were put to work as slaves, mostly on sugar plantations, enriching the imperial empires of the time. Apart from the misery and suffering of the captured men, women and children, the nefarious trade turned brother against brother, destroyed families and whole communities, and caused untold damage to the countries of West Africa.

It is painful to recall the way in which the captives were forced into detention and transported as human cargo, packed into the foul holds of ships like mere chattels and taken across the Atlantic to this so-called new world. On arrival, they were further dehumanized. That they were emasculated, sold, robbed of their culture, their skins branded by hot irons and imprinted with the label of their owners, still jolts the conscience, recalling and reinforcing the depths of man's inhumanity to man.

It took the international community almost 200 years to acknowledge slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity. We have been asked why we bother to rehash an event that happened so long ago. But for us, the people of the Caribbean and of Africa, 200 years is not so very long ago. As descendants of those who lived and died during those 500 years, it is our solemn obligation to ensure that their memories are honoured and that their suffering is never forgotten.

Not only did this massive relocation of African humanity across the Atlantic cause permanent and enormous damage to our ancestors and their descendants on every continent bordering the Atlantic, it led to the depopulation of Africa and the stifling of African creativity and production and was the genesis of a dependent relationship with Europe. We still see the unfortunate lingering effects today.

The subject of the draft resolution we introduce and present for adoption today is relevant in many respects. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. Yet contemporary forms of slavery persist today, reinforcing the need to ensure that such situations will not become a part of the history of the future.

The draft resolution expresses deep concern that it took the international community nearly 200 years to acknowledge slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity and expresses the view that they

should always have been acknowledged as such. The draft resolution is relevant in that it acknowledges that the slave trade and slavery are at the heart of situations of profound social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice, which continue to affect people of African descent today. Against this background, we emphasize the importance of the provision of effective remedies, recourse, redress and other measures at the national, regional and international levels aimed at countering the continued impact of slavery and the slave trade. That is nothing less than what has been agreed by the international community through the Durban Declaration of 2001.

The knowledge that we have today on the consequences of the slave trade and slavery is vague and imprecise. The reason for that is that the history of those events has been reported by the slavers and not by the slaves. The numbers transported across the Atlantic on those fateful journeys are in doubt. There may well have been considerably more. Our knowledge is restricted also due to lack of exploration on the interactions past and present of the peoples of Europe, Africa, the Americas, including the Caribbean, and Asia. We therefore welcome the work being undertaken by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the Slave Route Project's restructured International Scientific Committee and look forward to the outcome of its work in due course.

The lessons of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are still relevant, even as we recognize contemporary forms of slavery that exist today. We urge Member States that have not already done so to develop educational programmes, including through school curricula, to educate and inculcate so that future generations will be truthfully informed about the tragedy, lessons, history and consequences of slavery and the slave trade.

Through this draft resolution the Assembly will agree to designate 25 March 2007 as the "International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade". The Durban Declaration provides a succinct statement as to how to help close those dark chapters in history and to bring conciliation and healing. This draft resolution thus seeks to the honour the memory of those who died as a result of slavery, including through exposure to the horrors of the Middle Passage and in revolt and resistance to their enslavement.

Furthermore, their commemoration in 2007 will provide an opportunity to contribute to restoring the dignity of the victims by finding appropriate ways to express remorse, to apologize and to make amends. That will truly be an opportunity to do the right thing and bring some measure of closure to a dark past some would rather forget.

But we of the Caribbean need to remember in order to know from whence we came. We need to make sure that our children know of the dark deeds perpetrated in the name of commerce and profit. Carrying this knowledge with us and passing it on will be the surest way of protecting future generations from the scourge and terror that marked the foundation of our very existence. We owe this much to our forefathers who suffered enslavement, torture and very often death at the hands of their tormentors. We must never forget.

The adoption of this draft resolution will be a historic moment for CARICOM, and we are extremely grateful to all of the delegations that have sponsored the text. In addition to the original 137 sponsors listed in document A/61/L.28, the following countries have joined the list of co-sponsors: Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Honduras, Israel, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Mauritania, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia and Turkey.

We deeply appreciate the support we have received. That is very important for us. We are asking all Member States to join us in adopting the draft resolution by consensus.

Mr. Mbuende (Namibia): It gives me great pleasure to speak on agenda item 155, on the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, on behalf of the African Group. I wish to convey our sincere appreciation to our colleagues in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Group of countries for their initiative in submitting draft resolution A/61/L.28, which of course we fully support.

One of the horrific, painful and brutal chapters in the history of Africa, and indeed of mankind as a whole, is the slave trade and slavery. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which took place between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, robbed Africa of

millions of its most able-bodied citizens who were forced to leave their motherland and were transported to strange lands in the Americas and the Caribbean. Many perished during the long journey across the Atlantic. Of those who arrived at their final destination, some died due to severe weather conditions, not to speak of the inhumane treatment they suffered at the hands of their masters and the brutal system. Slavery and the slave trade have appropriately been declared a crime against humanity.

The proposed commemoration would be an occasion where we not only remind ourselves of the past but also rededicate ourselves to a more humane future. We have to keep on reminding ourselves of the past in order to ensure that it will never be repeated again in any form.

The year 1807 witnessed the abolition of the abhorrent system of the slave trade. That came about as a result of a combination of factors — political, economic, social and humanitarian. The abolishment of slavery also marked the triumph of the human spirit and the will to freedom. We are therefore also celebrating the resilience of a people to survive slavery and to lead successful lives in the diaspora against all odds. I would like to pay special tribute to the African people and people of African origin in the Caribbean and the Americas.

There is no doubt that the impact of slavery and the slave trade is still being felt in many ways up to the present day. It is therefore important to decide to set a day on which we commemorate the heroic struggle against slavery and to honour the lives of those who perished under slavery and the slave trade. The African Group would like to underline the need for the international community to take any measures necessary aimed at addressing the impact of slavery and the slave trade.

Finally, we reiterate our support for draft resolution A/61/L.28 before this Assembly, as presented by the Caribbean Community under this agenda item.

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): On agenda item 155, "Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade", I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 20 Member States that comprise the Rio Group.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 4 of the Declaration expressly proscribes the enslavement or subjection to servitude of any individual. The Rio Group unreservedly condemns slavery and servitude in all their forms and manifestations and urges the international community to increase its vigilance and to take all measures necessary to eliminate such practices. In that context, the upcoming International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, to be celebrated on 2 December, provides a signal opportunity to renew our common struggle to remove that scourge from all societies.

The forced transportation of millions of Africans to the Americas as slaves continues to have a grave impact on the lives of the descendants of slaves in our part of the world. The legacy of the nefarious trade is manifested in many ways, including through economic and social inequalities, social exclusion and discrimination based on race. No less detrimental has been its impact on Africa, whose development has suffered immeasurably as a consequence. The Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in 2001, therefore fittingly deems the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity. Our Group supports calls for redress for the wrongs committed, in accordance with the Durban Programme of Action, which we view as vital in addressing this important issue.

The Rio Group is fully supportive of the initiative of the countries of the Caribbean Community to commemorate on 25 March 2007, the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. That date represents a significant milestone in the ultimate abolition of slavery, not only in the British Empire, but, together with like initiatives both before and after, throughout the world. This occasion also provides pause to honour the memory of slaves who, though subject to the most barbaric and inhuman of conditions, never lost the will to be free and to live in dignity. Emerging from the horrors of the middle passage and the plantation, peoples of African descent now enrich societies and nations far beyond the continent. The historical record and contemporary realities are replete with examples of their contribution to progress in all domains of human endeavour.

In the year ahead, several States within our region and beyond will implement programmes reflecting on

the rich heritage and culture of Africans and people of African descent in our various societies. It is the hope of the Rio Group that the occasion will serve to enhance knowledge and understanding of the impact of slavery and the slave trade, and to identify means of addressing the legacy of the trade and to help in charting a more hopeful future for all peoples everywhere.

The States members of the Rio Group have all co-sponsored draft resolution A/61/L.28. We unequivocally endorse its adoption by consensus by the Assembly and invite all Members to lend their valuable support to this cause.

Mr. Jokinen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

At the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the European Union was pleased to join international consensus in acknowledging that

"slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims, and further acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade, and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences" (*A/CONF.189/12, Chap. I, para. 13*).

In supporting today's draft resolution, the European Union strongly reiterates that position. The European Union, like others, wants to consider the complex historical, social and legal issues related to slavery and the slave trade fully and in a transparent

manner. We remain convinced, however, that those issues are best addressed within the framework of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. As the European Union stated at the time, nothing in the Durban Declaration or Programme of Action can affect the general legal principle which precludes the retrospective application of international law in matters of State responsibility. Likewise, those documents cannot impose obligations, liability or a right to compensation on anyone. The same is true of this draft resolution.

The two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, on 25 March 2007, will hold enormous importance and significance for those countries whose people suffered from that trade and will be an opportunity for the European Union to remember the millions of persons who suffered from that tragedy. We welcome the opportunity, provided by this draft resolution, to commemorate this turning point in history at the United Nations. For those reasons, the European Union looks forward to joining the consensus in support of adopting this draft resolution.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica): The Jamaican delegation is proud to be part of the joint initiative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that led to the inscription of agenda item 155, entitled "Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade", and the submission of draft resolution A/61/L.28.

Jamaica fully aligns itself with the statement made by Margaret Ferrari, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Chair of CARICOM, who, on behalf of the more than 140 sponsors of the draft resolution, introduced the text to the General Assembly. Jamaica also naturally anticipates that, given the fundamental importance to the international community of the issues addressed in draft resolution A/61/L.28, the Assembly will readily agree to the adoption of the text by consensus.

As the draft resolution so fittingly recalls and recognizes, both the slave trade and slavery are among the worst violations of human rights in the history of humanity, bearing in mind in particular their scale and duration. The Durban Declaration, which was an outcome of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 7 September 2001, referred to them as

appalling tragedies in the history of humanity, especially in their negation of the essence of the victims. The Declaration not only declared slavery and the slave trade to be a crime against humanity; it also declared that they should always have been considered as such.

It is therefore of fundamental importance that, as we engage in this solemn debate and proceed to consider and take action on draft resolution A/61/L.28, we dare not forget that the horrific Middle Passage, which characterized the very essence of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, was responsible for the deaths of millions of Africans as a direct result of torture, malnutrition, disease and resistance. Historians also estimate that by the end of the entire process, two Africans had died during the Middle Passage for every one who had successfully arrived at the plantations in the Americas.

Against that sombre backdrop, the draft resolution seeks to honour the memory of those who died as a result of slavery, including through exposure to the Middle Passage and in revolt and resistance against enslavement. Accordingly, the General Assembly is being invited to note that 2007 will mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and to take a decision designating 25 March 2007 as the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

CARICOM countries, along with our African partners, the United Kingdom and other countries, will be actively involved in other activities to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in 2007.

I should like to mention the fact that, at the domestic level, Jamaica intends to engage in a year-long series of activities, including the erection of national monuments along the coastal areas where the slaves arrived on our shores. In so doing, we will recognize not only the victims who died as a result of slavery and the slave trade, but also those unsung heroes – those anti-slavery activists – who contributed significantly to the struggle.

With the adoption of this draft resolution, along with the commemorative activities to be held in 2007, let us, in solemn honour of all the victims, now begin the initial steps towards acknowledgement, atonement, healing and reconciliation, while underlining the firm

resolve of the international community that such horrific acts, which so dehumanized the victims in terms of their dignity, spirit and self-worth, should never be forgotten or be allowed to recur.

Beyond those symbolic gestures, it should be emphasized that the legacy of the slave trade and slavery are of fundamental importance not just to the Caribbean and Africa; their consequences should rightly stir the conscience of the international community, especially considering their continued impact in political, social and economic terms. We therefore stress the need for remedies, redress, recourse and compensatory and other measures at the relevant levels, aimed at addressing the lingering impact of slavery and the slave trade.

In conclusion, Jamaica therefore urges that, in honouring the memory of the victims of the twin evils of slavery and the slave trade, the international community agree to erect a permanent memorial in a place of prominence in the hallowed halls of the United Nations — a memorial that should stand as a stark reminder of man's inhumanity to man.

Mrs. Booker (Bahamas): The Bahamas, as a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), is pleased to join the more than 150 sponsors of this draft resolution and fully endorses the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Bahamas also wishes to thank the delegation of Jamaica and the other members of CARICOM for the outstanding work carried out in spearheading the negotiations on this historic draft resolution on behalf of the Community.

Today is indeed historic for all of us, as we are about to set the stage for and embark on perhaps the most significant event in the history of our lands. Today's consideration and adoption of this very important draft resolution by the General Assembly are meaningful, as they represent an attempt to erect a bridge spanning two hundred years and the seas and the lands of Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean.

Since the creation of the Organization in 1945, we have too often heard calls echoed throughout these halls urging Member States to comply with their obligations under various human rights instruments and conventions. Today, we, as a Community, reiterate the call for the entire international community to reaffirm, recall, acknowledge and pay recognition to the human

rights abuses and violations suffered by millions of our ancestors in the motherland of Africa, in "tween decks" of ships during the 3,700-mile Trans-Atlantic journey, on the docks of ports, in the streets, in the plantation fields and in the homes of plantation owners throughout the Americas.

The call made here today is long overdue. However, we cannot and should not lament the past, but rather look to the future that the adoption of this draft resolution will hold for all of us. Nor can we continue to pay lip service to the ongoing scourges of human rights abuses and violations that still present a challenge for the Organization some 61 years later.

As we commemorate this momentous and historic occasion, let us not forget that the practice of slavery, in some form or another, still exists today. We must not rest until all people are free from enslavement, are no longer the victim of torture and trafficking, and are able to enjoy their full rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a fundamental principle of the Organization.

The Bahamas commends the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, for having declared slavery and the slave trade a crime against humanity. However, it is disheartening to note that, yet again, the recent draft resolution on global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action recently adopted by the Third Committee of the General Assembly, did not achieve consensus. What are we saying to the millions of victims of human rights abuses and violations who look to this organization for hope? How is it that we are so concerned about language, terminology and the interpretation thereof that the important issues are overlooked? It is the hope of the delegation of the Bahamas that we can build consensus on the issue of human rights and learn from the victims whose lives we work here to improve.

The Bahamas is proud of the hard work and sacrifice made by its African ancestors in contributing to the growth and development of a country that has a longstanding history of participatory democracy. It is a nation that still maintains many of the customs inherited from ex-slaves and liberated Africans,

predominantly from the Yoruba tribe, following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1807. Customs such as the asue, friendly societies and affiliated lodges, the jumping dance, ring play and our most popular cultural event, the Junkanoo — named for a former slave, John Canoe — still flourish in the Bahamas and are very much a part of the Bahamian cultural and social psyche.

As we celebrate the adoption of this draft resolution today — hopefully by consensus — we remember those who have worked tirelessly for the preservation of our cultural heritage. The Bahamas has the sad honour to announce the sudden passing in Jamaica this past Saturday of the Chairman of the Bahamas National Cultural Development Commission, Mr. Winston Saunders. Mr. Saunders was a cultural icon whose work in the area of culture extended far beyond the shores of his beloved land of the Bahamas. As Chairman of the Bahamas National Cultural Commission, he was spearheading plans for the commemoration in 2007. On behalf of the Permanent Representative of the Bahamas, Ms. Paulette Bethel, and the delegation of the Bahamas, I extend sincere condolences to his wife, Ms. Gail Saunders, and to his entire family.

In conclusion, as stated by the Foreign Minister of the Bahamas in his address to the General Assembly during the general debate in September, the Bahamas plans to undertake a number of commemorative events, including a festival of the arts, which will feature various countries and regions in Africa, through theatre, art, music and dance. These series of events aim to foster knowledge, awareness and appreciation of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its significance to the social, economic, cultural and political life of our society. We are pleased to be a part of this historic commemoration and to re-establish our common link and heritage with other countries affected by this devastating tragedy and crime against humanity.

Mr. Mérorès (Haiti) (spoke in French): It is with pride that my delegation associates itself with the statement made by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), submitted draft resolution A/61/L.28, which designates 25 March 2007 the two-hundredth anniversary of the law enacted by the imperial Parliament of Great Britain on the abolition of the slave trade throughout its empire. It also aligns itself with the statements made by those delegations and

regional groups that have given their unequivocal support to this draft resolution.

Although the international community waited almost 200 years before recognizing slavery and the slave trade as a crime against humanity, that delay did not discourage those who bear, and will long continue to bear, the deep and tangible scars of slavery.

The dignified descendants and heirs of that huddled mass of people, torn away against their will from Africa, their motherland, had to wait two centuries to see 23 August 2004 recognized as the day of the San Domingo slave uprising. But today we in CARICOM and our many partners are ready to adopt this draft resolution, and that is because the voice of reason has prevailed; all understood and realized that there was no other choice but to join with us to put an end to the awful chapter of the slave trade and start over with a new kind of contract, whose new resolutions, declarations and conventions on the issue will serve as a compass in future.

In adopting this draft resolution, we seek to commemorate the abolition of a horrendous phenomenon that, from the time of the very first attempts to establish it, should have appeared unconscionable to those who, in an outrageous misuse of power, abused, without a qualm and with total impunity, an entire race and an entire continent. Indeed, the duty of remembrance forces us all, victims and perpetrators both, to recall in particular the deaths of those millions of men and women who, torn away from the land of their birth, Africa, died as a result of slavery, especially while crossing the Atlantic, either as the result of abuse or as a consequence of their resistance to the new and appalling status that was being imposed on them, with total disregard for their dignity.

On 23 August 1791, Haiti, which was then known as San Domingo, witnessed a general uprising on the part of its slaves. Following centuries of terrible suffering, their descendants exercised the right to force those who had instigated and profited from the flourishing but degrading slave trade to face reality. That is because, at long last, the echoing cries of the millions of wasted and reviled lives were finally heard and their demand for justice heeded.

Slavery and the black slave trade are considered by the international community as the most serious human rights violations in the history of humanity. For

centuries, the slave trade fed the oceans, fertilized fields and contributed to the opulence of cities. While forcefully condemning those practices from the past, we must step up our vigilance to ensure that might never again defeats right and that human beings are never again subjected to the whims of the powerful or of their henchmen. We must finally recognize that force has its limits and that all human beings are born equal and remain so before the law.

I would be remiss if I did not mention here the name of Toussaint Louverture, the precursor of Haitian independence, who died in April 1803 at Fort de Joux, France, from grief and deprivation. Eight months after the death of that great visionary, Haiti proclaimed its independence, on 1 January 1804. Through that eloquent act, slaves and their descendants not only ensured the triumph of the values of liberty, equality and justice throughout the territory, but also opened the way for, and assisted in, the emancipation and liberation of several countries of the region and other parts of the world.

In a few months' time, on 25 March 2007, we will commemorate and deeply reflect on the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. We must pay therefore homage to all those who made the supreme sacrifice, and we must recognize all those who went against the interests of party and clan to guarantee the freedom that we enjoy today.

It is on that basis, and with honour and pride, that Haiti will welcome the adoption — by consensus, we hope — of draft resolution A/61/L.28.

Mr. Sen (India): It is my privilege to speak in the debate on the agenda item on the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. I am grateful to the Member States of the Caribbean, who have worked to have this item inscribed on the agenda of the General Assembly at its current session.

I will make a few comments on what we consider to be the important elements of this resolution and on the significance of the resolution itself. I have been asked to do this by some of my friends in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and I am privileged to have their friendship. I will mainly concentrate on the Caribbean, for the sake of both brevity and clarity.

The resolution speaks of filling and overcoming the knowledge gap. This is important. The Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines made a reference to the slave narratives. We think it important that the UNESCO Committee on the Slave Route project really examine these slave narratives, because the narratives of the descendants of those who actually carried out the slave trade, and even the narratives of many from the developing countries, are really the narratives of the history of the State and of Governments. They do not, therefore, represent history, but a usurpation of history. Therefore, it is only a subaltern history that can reclaim history and thereby fill the knowledge gap.

The resolution speaks of the horrors of the Middle Passage and of the revolt and resistance to slavery. Indeed, between 35 to 50 per cent of the African captives died on these slave ships. Over many centuries, there was a continuous trail of revolt on the slave ships themselves, spreading from there to the Caribbean and to North and South America. One of the most important such revolts took place in Jamaica in the middle of the seventeenth century. These revolts spread throughout the entire region. Even the landscape in the Caribbean is a mute witness to this tragic history: the sugar cane that was brought by Columbus. We remember how discoveries actually turned into conquest and robbery. We remember the bread fruit trees that were brought by the infamous Captain Bligh of the mutiny on the *Bounty* and the star apple trees in Jamaica brought for the provisioning of slaves.

We also have narratives from the other side that are fairly honest. Stedman, for instance, was sent to suppress the revolt in Suriname in 1774 and, therefore, his narrative cannot be thought to be propaganda. He paints a truly grim picture of a whole country that was based on widespread torture and was really a vast concentration camp. No wonder revolts were as frequent and had as great an intensity as hurricanes.

Many of these revolts succeeded and, in fact, were able to set up pockets of self-governing communities based on many African customs. The Permanent Representative of the Bahamas referred to some of the cultural customs that were carried over and that still exist. In fact, if one looks at the American War of Independence of 1776, it did not really transform society immediately. The revolt that the Permanent Representative of Haiti referred to, the revolt in San

Domingo, actually destroyed the colonial slave structure and had a very far-reaching impact of a societal nature.

It is indeed necessary to fill the knowledge gap, because so many people know about the revolt of Spartacus in Rome, but how many know of the revolt in San Domingo led by Toussaint L'Ouverture? How many also realize that this paved the way for the establishment of the first black republic in the Caribbean? The military loss by France in 1803 predates, by 150 years, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Viet Nam in 1954. When the resolution speaks of the restoration of dignity, that is based on the recovery of memory. It is only by remembering such facts and propagating them that one can really reclaim one's history.

Over many centuries — from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century — the colonial Powers simultaneously fought three kinds of wars: the wars of plunder and piracy; the wars of the extermination of the local people and the expropriation of their land; and the wars in Africa to have African captives to use as slave labour. I feel that I should point this out in the context of some recent events. In many of these revolts, the indigenous people fought shoulder to shoulder with the African blacks. For that reason, the Maya Indians were deported to Cuba in the second half of the nineteenth century. We personally feel that such a choice between the two should not have been made. It is only through the solidarity of the indigenous people and the African people that we can make any genuine advances and be true to the history that really exists and read in the slave narratives.

I also wanted to say that the wealth generated by this contributed to the strength of the European economy, to science and technology and even to the development of culture — all of which are contaminated by their origins.

Looking at the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, I remember a recently released film based on Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice". Hers are extraordinary novels of great artistic power, but the idyllic picture that these novels paint hides one fundamental thing. It comes through in only one remark by one character, who says that the owner of a certain estate has a huge plantation in the West Indies. So, all of this is built on that.

This is not to say that all intellectuals were like that. There were intellectuals, such as Dr. Johnson, for instance, by no means a radical — in fact a Tory — who condemned, in no uncertain terms, the waging of war against countries simply because they could not resist. They condemned the invading of lands because they were fruitful; the spreading of navigation, only to propagate vice; the visiting of distant lands, only to lay them waste.

Looking back on all of that, a great radical thinker of the last decades of the nineteenth century saw the interconnection between all these events, including the case of India, for example, from which indentured labour was taken to the West Indies. He saw the interconnection of all these factors, and saw this truly as the foundation of the colonial system.

If my memory does not deceive me, he wrote that the discovery of gold and silver in the Americas, the extirpation and entombment in mines of the entire indigenous population, the beginning of the plunder of India, the turning of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins; all of this signified the rosy dawn of the era of industrial production. He said these were the idyllic proceedings that marked the moments of primitive accumulation. Therefore, in his very bitter phrase, he said that capital therefore came dripping from head to foot from every pore, with blood and dirt. The only way that this origin of capital can be redressed is through working for a truly equitable world order which would be underpinned by equitable political and economic rules. This means fundamental, true reform of the international economic and political machinery, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations.

It is because of this that I would also recall the great words of our first Prime Minister, one of the leaders of the freedom struggle, Jawarlal Nehru, who understood these interconnections and these imperatives. In addressing the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955, Nehru said that "there is nothing more terrible, there is nothing more horrible than the infinite tragedy of Africa in the past few hundred years". He said that when he thought of that tragedy, everything else paled into insignificance, including what we had experienced in Asia. The draft resolution also refers to the profound social and economic inequality and to the need to find effective remedies.

The Caribbean is rich in natural resources, with its vast reserves of iron, bauxite, copper, coal and chromium, as well as 10 per cent of the world's hydrocarbon resources. The Caribbean basin is virtually a sea of oil and gas, according to many estimates. And yet it is the big corporations of the advanced countries that really have the overwhelming majority equity ownership and which get the lion's share of the profits derived from these resources. The situation is made worse by the decline of the sugar industry, the relative failure of the great Nobel Prize-winning W. Arthur Lewis's model of building industrialization on the basis of bauxite and oil, the tremendous emigration of the best and brightest and high unemployment. Ultimately, many of these gross domestic product (GDP) statistics simply mask structures of dependence.

Therefore, the question of the effective remedies remains. Effective remedies can only be those that effectively address the structures of dependence and overcome them, through a fundamental change in the international economic institutions and the rules that underpin them.

The mind in the Caribbean has never been enslaved. The mind is free. That has been shown by the great writers of the Caribbean such as Derek Walcott, George Lamming and Aimé Césaire. W. Arthur Lewis also spoke of what he called protest leaders and creative leaders. Given the enormous middle class in the Caribbean and given the enormous human talent there, I am sure there will be both these kinds of leaders to lead the process of transformation in the Caribbean.

It is indeed for us a matter of great pride to be among the first to support and sponsor this draft resolution: we support the declaration of 25 March 2007 as the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

But the way forward to achieve effective remedies, we feel, is along the lines that I have outlined, so that the societies in the Caribbean can be helped to be integrated and to be at peace with themselves, so that they can take control of their own destiny, so that they can have a fair share of their natural resources and so that they can stop the haemorrhaging of their best and brightest and thereby

complete the revolution that was begun in Santo Domingo in 1791.

Ms. Núñez Mordoché (*spoke in Spanish*): Our national hero José Martí wrote:

"I know of a deep sorrow
Among the nameless woes:
The enslavement of men
Is the great shame of the world."

Those simple verses of the apostle of our Cuban homeland are a synthesis of the inhumanity of one of the most sordid chapters of modern history: Trans-Atlantic trade in African slaves.

The development of this process, driven by the insatiable greed of European slave traders who needed slave labour to build up their great colonial empires in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has left deep tangible traces in Cuba that bear witness to that time, in the form of old sugar mills, coffee plantations, slave quarters and other constructions remaining in our countryside, some of them already blending in with their natural surroundings.

As part of the cruel slave trade, about 1.3 million Africans arrived on our island, most from the sub-Saharan part of the continent. The arrival of Lukumí, Carabalies, Congos, Gangas, Minas, Bibies, Yorubas and other ethnic groups had an immediate impact on the colonial society of the time and, after a complex transcultural process, gave birth to the Cuban nationality, which is essentially a mix of the Hispanic and the African.

However, a major group of slaves brought by force did not resign themselves to being exploited. Those who decided to run away from the whips of the foremen and the humiliations of the plantations framed the principle of the spirit of rebelliousness and emancipation of the Cuban people. In today's Cuba, the *cimarrón* — the runaway slave — and the *palenque* — their hideout — are symbols of an entire people's struggle for independence and sovereignty.

Histories similar to that of Cuba, relating to the slave trade, occurred in almost all the areas of the American continent and the Caribbean. The slave route was an intrinsic part of the bloody exploitation and impoverishment of the African continent and the cruel discrimination suffered by the descendants of slaves in the western Hemisphere for many years.

Nowadays, many attempt to ignore, justify or, worse yet, erase this sad chapter of our history. Hence the crucial importance of draft resolution A/61/L.28.

Cuba would like to take this opportunity to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). In recent years, there has been an escalation of opposition in former colonial metropolises to any formula aimed at causing them to honour their historical debt towards those who endured slavery for centuries.

Those who amassed their huge fortunes at the expense of the sweat and blood of slaves and who plunged our nations into the dreadful consequences of mono-production and single-crop economies, cannot simply wash their hands now of their dark past through a self-induced historical amnesia in the framework of neoliberal globalization, where the rich, the same ones as before, are ever richer and where our nations are doomed to exclusion and impoverishment.

Despite the tight blockade and the campaigns of slander, Cuba will carry on its programmes of cooperation with African, Caribbean and other third world nations, as part of the joint effort to reverse the consequences of the slave trade and other tragic moments of colonialism and neocolonialism. We Cubans will continue to study and preserve the legacy of those who, despite toiling in the Antillean plantations, left us their language, their religious beliefs, their music and temperament, and their spirit of struggle for independence and sovereignty, and who changed us forever.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): While the world closed its eyes for more than three centuries, millions of Africans were brutally torn from their homeland and families and sold into human bondage. Though the United States had been a nation for just 30 years when the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was abolished, the trade's legacy of hatred and pain has been felt throughout the past two centuries and throughout the hemisphere.

In 1807, the United States outlawed the importation of slaves. However, the fight over slavery itself would not end in the United States until our own Civil War — the bloodiest war in American history and a conflict that claimed more than 600,000 American lives.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, countless individuals in the United States and elsewhere committed their lives to ending the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery. Their efforts deserve recognition today.

The United States, as a society, has gone to great lengths to ensure equitable treatment for all citizens, regardless of race or country of origin. When there is injustice, appropriate remedies lie within our legal system and the implementation of civil rights legislation already in place. As a multicultural society, the United States maintains a strong commitment to fighting racism, safeguarding the dignity of people regardless of race or background, and countering the hateful legacy of slavery. The adoption today of this draft resolution, which the United States will support, is in keeping with that commitment and those efforts.

With regard to today's draft resolution, however, it is deeply regrettable that the sponsors chose to include references to the Durban Declaration in the text. Our views on the Durban Declaration are well known and the adoption of the draft resolution will not change those views. We do not support, *inter alia*, its language regarding reparations and compensation for individuals living now, and thus we do not support an emphasis on that point in the draft resolution, even in a preambular paragraph. The references needlessly politicize what is otherwise a genuine moment of solidarity. A more open and understanding approach by the sponsors to the views of other delegations would have been more in keeping with the spirit of reconciliation that otherwise inspires our action here today.

As we recognize the anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, it is important to note that the struggle against slavery goes on. Today, 200 years after the event we commemorate with this draft resolution, thousands of people every year are still being taken from their homes and their families, transported hundreds and even thousands of miles, and sold into human bondage. An estimated 12.3 million people, many of whom are children, are enslaved in forced or bonded labour, sexual servitude and involuntary servitude. Human trafficking is nothing less than the modern-day continuation of the slave trade, and its victims cannot be ignored.

If we fail to protect those powerless to protect themselves, we are as culpable as those who turned a

blind eye towards slavery for more than 300 years. We cannot celebrate the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade 200 years ago while ignoring what is going on today. This is a call to action. As with the abolition of slavery and the slave trade itself, there is a moral imperative that human trafficking be stopped. And it will be stopped only through the collective will of civilized nations and people.

The abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was an important moral step in dismantling the institution of slavery, and we are right to recognize and celebrate its two-hundredth anniversary. We must work together to ensure that never again will a human being be a commodity; that never again will a man, woman or child be bought and sold; and that never again will generations be abused while the world stands by and does nothing.

Mr. Barnes (Liberia): The Liberian delegation welcomes the opportunity to join in the deliberation on agenda item 155, "Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade".

For many in this great Hall, it is mind-boggling that the world community has taken this long in grappling with the idea to commemorate what is perhaps one of the saddest chapters in human history. That calamity, which epitomizes the worst of man's inhumanity to man, raped the African continent of valuable human resources and laid the bedrock of Africa's continued underdevelopment and dependency.

As a nation that traces its birth to the aftermath of the indignity and incalculable cruelty that characterized the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Liberia remains a vivid reminder of the indomitable spirit of Africans and those of African descent. While the commemoration of the abolition of slavery is a necessary step in the right direction, it is not by any means an end in itself. In that context, the international community must continue to adopt concrete measures to ensure that all the characteristics of slavery, some of which still exist, are totally abolished.

The adoption of draft resolution A/61/L.28 is the least the Assembly can do in memory of the dead, as well as in support of those who continue to be affected by the consequences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. I thank the sponsors of the draft resolution for their courage and foresight, and further urge that the text be adopted without a vote.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade now stands as one of the most inhuman enterprises in history. At a time when capitals in Europe and America championed the Enlightenment, our merchants were enslaving a continent. The "rights of man" did not extend to Africa. Racism drove the triangular trade and its horrors. Some 12 million were transported and some 3 million killed.

The date 25 March 2007 will mark 200 years to the day since a parliamentary bill, the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, was passed by the British Parliament to abolish the slave trade in the then British Empire. That Act was the beginning of the long road to the eventual abolition of slavery within the Empire 25 years later. The Act made it illegal for British ships to be involved in the slave trade and marked the beginning of the end for the Trans-Atlantic traffic in human beings. A year later, the West African Squadron of the Royal Navy was established off the coast of Africa to suppress slave trading across the Atlantic Ocean. Over the next 60 years, its anti-slavery operations along the West Coast of Africa and into East Africa and the Caribbean enforced the ban.

The 1807 Act was the culmination of 20 years of dedication to the cause of abolitionism by William Wilberforce, a British parliamentarian, writer and social reformer. The passing of his parliamentary Act marked a critical step for the United Kingdom, permitting it to enter into the modern world and a new and more just moral universe.

Accordingly, the British Government will commemorate this crucial turning point in history through a range of activities both at home and overseas throughout 2007. Therefore, we warmly welcome the adoption today of this draft resolution, which we are proud to co-sponsor. We look forward to the planned United Nations commemorative day to mark the two-hundredth anniversary. We will work with members of the Caribbean Community and others in preparing a series of events at the United Nations that suitably reflect the vital historical importance of this day.

The two-hundredth anniversary in March 2007 holds enormous importance and significance for those countries whose people suffered from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. We want to learn together the

lessons that it teaches us about our past, but also about our present and our future. The bicentenary is an opportunity for us all to remember the millions who suffered, to pay tribute to the courage and moral conviction of all those who campaigned for abolition and to confront the tragic fact that throughout this world today, contemporary forms of slavery still persist, two centuries after the argument for abolition was won.

This year, in fact, marks the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. We would urge those States that have not yet done so to accede to that instrument.

As Wilberforce concluded when he first described to the British Parliament the horror of slavery more than 200 hundred years ago, "You may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know". That is our obligation today to those who still suffer servitude and human trafficking.

Mr. Chibaeff (France) (*spoke in French*): France fully associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. In my national capacity, I wish to draw the attention of delegations to a number of additional points.

France naturally shares the willingness expressed here to commemorate the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. A memorial dedicated to the abolition of slavery, intended to call French citizens and foreign visitors to reflection and meditation, will soon be erected in the French city of Nantes, which was an important centre of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

To fulfil the duty of remembrance, our country continues to take numerous actions to acknowledge the vile crime that was slavery and to raise French awareness about that grave subject. The French law enacted on 10 May 2001 explicitly recognizes the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity. In that spirit, the abolition of slavery will now be officially and solemnly commemorated in France on a specific day, 10 May, each year. Finally, a Slavery Remembrance Committee has been established for the specific purpose of proposing to the ministry responsible for national education curriculum

adjustment measures and awareness-raising activities in the schools.

It is in that spirit that France intends to align itself with the will expressed in draft resolution A/61/L.28 to commemorate at the national level the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Mr. Majoer (Netherlands): My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

Over the course of several centuries, approximately 10 million people of African descent were transported from the African continent to the Americas under appalling conditions. The Netherlands, among other nations, played a sad role during that episode of world history.

The Netherlands co-sponsored this draft resolution and sincerely appreciates and respects the celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in 2007, believing that it is tremendously important to remember the darker side of history in particular.

As stated in the intervention by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union, the draft resolution also raises a number of complex legal issues, which are best addressed within the framework of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Nothing in the Declaration or Programme of Action can affect the general legal principle that precludes the retroactive application of international law in matters of State responsibility. Likewise, those documents cannot impose obligations, liability or a right to compensation on anyone. The same is true of this draft resolution.

Since 1 July 2002, the Netherlands has celebrated the abolition of slavery with an annual national commemoration. A monument in Amsterdam was unveiled in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix. In 2003, the National Institute for Slavery History was created. It established a website offering educational and historical information on slavery and the slave trade.

Last but not least, slavery is fully included in the national historical canon, meaning that all school children in the Netherlands learn about this tragic episode through the school curriculums.

We are very thankful to the Caribbean Community for taking the initiative on this draft resolution. We would warmly welcome its adoption.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 35/2, of 13 October 1980, I now call on the observer for the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization.

Mr. Baghwat-Singh (Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization): I do not believe that anyone in this Hall — or, for that matter, anyone outside it — will have reservations about this draft resolution. We in the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization have been particularly concerned with related issues — such as human trafficking, child labour, bigotry, the slavery of poverty and the plight of downtrodden and oppressed people in many of our Member States. We would wish that future consideration of this item in the General Assembly would broaden its scope to include the issues that I have just mentioned.

We cannot celebrate this anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade without keeping in mind those who still suffer under the yoke of present-day slavery in its varied forms. We can best honour the memory of those who carried the burden of slavery in the past by working to erase it in all of its manifestations and to bestow dignity on all humankind in equal measure.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/61/L.28, as orally corrected.

In connection with the draft resolution, I would like to give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Botnaru: In connection with draft resolution A/61/L.28, I wish to inform the General Assembly that this oral statement is being made in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

“Under paragraphs 3 and 4, respectively, of draft resolution A/61/L.28 as orally corrected, the General Assembly would decide

‘to convene on 25 March 2007, a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly in commemoration of the Two-

hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade’

and would

‘request the Secretary-General to establish a programme of outreach, with the involvement of Member States and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to appropriately commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade’.

“The activities envisaged under paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, if adopted, would consist of one special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the International Day for the Commemoration of the Two-hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, on 25 March 2007. The activities envisaged under paragraph 4 of the draft resolution, if adopted, would consist of, first, an exhibit of African and Caribbean art in the Visitor's Lobby at United Nations Headquarters and the issuance of a commemorative poster, to increase public awareness of the commemorative meeting; secondly, a cultural event, to be organized on 23 August 2007, in connection with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Day for Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition; thirdly, various speaking engagements at meetings organized by Member States, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and educational institutions, such as the annual anti-slavery awards ceremony of the NGO Anti-Slavery International, in London, and the annual meeting of the Museum of the African Diaspora, in San Francisco; fourthly, involvement in school programmes at the Iziko Museum in Cape Town; fifthly, an event at the House of the Slaves on Gorée Island, Senegal; and sixthly, informational materials, including press releases, backgrounders, a web site and promotional banners.

“The estimated requirements for the year 2007 would amount to \$303,900. No provisions have been made under the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 for the activities

envisaged under draft resolution A/61/L.28. The Secretariat would intend to accommodate the requirements to the fullest extent possible from within the appropriations available under section 27 (Public Information) of the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, and report any additional requirements in the context of the second performance report for the biennium 2006-2007."

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/61/L.28 as orally corrected.

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that, since the issuance of the draft resolution, Andorra and Ukraine have become sponsors of draft resolution A/61/L.28.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.28 as orally corrected?

Draft resolution A/61/L.28 as orally corrected was adopted (resolution 61/19).

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada, who wishes to explain her delegation's position following the adoption of the resolution.

Ms. Stewart (Canada): The resolution we have just adopted has as its goal the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the passing of Britain's Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, which abolished slavery in the then British empire. Canada believes that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was morally repugnant and a stain on the fabric of history. Were the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to occur today, it would constitute a crime against humanity.

At the 2001 World Conference against Racism, in Durban, Canada stated its understanding with respect to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action that under international law there is no right to a remedy for historical acts that were not illegal at the time at which they occurred. Likewise, this resolution does not affect the rule against the retroactive application of international law in matters of State responsibility. It does not create a right to compensation, nor does it impose any obligations or liability on anyone.

Our support for this resolution should not be interpreted as a change in Canada's traditional position

on this specific issue. Rather, our endorsement of the resolution should be viewed as enthusiastic support for the marking of a historic event. The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was a seminal event in the development of human rights for all. It is very fitting to mark its two-hundredth anniversary. Canadians take great pride in the freedom our land subsequently offered to those who travelled to Canada via the Underground Railroad. Those who settled in Canada had an important and lasting effect on our society. Our country is stronger for their contribution.

The resolution we have just adopted is also the latest example of the long history of the special relationship between Canada and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Canada is pleased to have co-sponsored the resolution, and congratulates CARICOM and its member States on the resolution and the anniversary it celebrates.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude this stage of its consideration of agenda item 155?

It was so decided.

Reports of the Second and Fifth Committees

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now take up a report of the Second Committee on agenda item 58 and a report of the Fifth Committee on agenda item 117.

If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the two Committee reports that are before it today.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of position. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the two Committees have been made clear in the Committees and are reflected in the relevant official records.

May I remind members that, under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the General Assembly agreed that, when the same draft resolution is considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, that is, either in the Committee or in plenary meeting, unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee.

May I remind delegations that, also in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendations contained in the reports of the Second and Fifth Committees, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take decisions in the same manner as was done in the Committees, unless the Assembly is notified otherwise in advance. I therefore hope that we may proceed to adopt without a vote those recommendations that were adopted without a vote in the respective Committees.

Agenda item 58

Operational activities for development: operational activities for development of the United Nations system

Report of the Second Committee (A/61/427)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Second Committee in paragraph 13 of its report.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to explain their positions prior to the adoption of the draft resolution.

Mr. Terrazzani (Monaco) (spoke in French): My delegation regrets that it was not in a position to be a co-sponsor of the draft resolution entitled "Commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund", which is contained in the report before us. The Principality of Monaco recognizes the importance of the work of UNICEF and will seek to strengthen our support for it. Children's issues are a priority for the Principality. I simply wanted to point that out.

Mr. Schneider (Germany): Unfortunately, we missed the deadline for placing our name on the list of sponsors of the draft resolution on the commemoration

of the operations of UNICEF. Germany would therefore like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the work of UNICEF, as well as to heartily congratulate the Fund on the occasion of its sixtieth anniversary. In that regard, we strongly support the draft resolution.

The Acting President: We will now take a decision on the draft resolution.

The Second Committee adopted the draft resolution recommended in paragraph 13 of its report, entitled "Commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund". May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 61/20).

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 58.

Agenda item 117

Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/61/592)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 7 of its report.

We will now take a decision on the draft resolution entitled "Renovation of the residence of the Secretary-General". The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 61/21).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 117.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.



General Assembly

Sixty-first session

60th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 29 November 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

Official Records

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 14

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/61/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/355)

Draft resolutions (A/61/L.31, A/61/L.32, A/61/L.33 and A/61/L.34)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The situation in the Middle East region still represents a serious conflict that requires action to confront the present dangers and their grave regional and international repercussions. This calls for maximum efforts to reach an internationally agreed comprehensive and lasting settlement to put an end to all conflicts in the region, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We should not ignore the gravity of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, since the elevation of poverty levels and unemployment, already high, and the deterioration of vital civil infrastructure, in addition to shortages of food, water, electricity and other basic necessities, as is the case in the Gaza Strip, aggravate the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and can exacerbate tendencies towards violence and hatred and encourage extremism. The continuing deterioration of the situation is reason enough for the international community, including civil society, to

make every possible effort to put an end to the killing machines on both sides. The lives of civilians should be preserved and protected at any price possible.

This situation also calls for a resumption and activation of dialogue and the political process. We are all aware that the solution to this conflict can only be achieved politically. Therefore, all resolutions adopted by the international community should be implemented forthwith, and the cycle of violence and counter-violence should come to an end, since it can only produce further losses in life and property for both sides. Positive steps as well must be taken immediately to reach a peaceful, comprehensive, lasting and just solution based on two States living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has lasted for more than half a century, represents one of the main areas of grave concern for the international community. A solution to that conflict would open the door for a comprehensive political settlement that can encourage political and economic stability in the Middle East region.

I would now like to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/61/L.31 to A/61/L.34, in the course of his statement.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In an unequivocal show of support for the Palestinian people

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



in its quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine, Member States, observers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations and civil society addressed the special meeting of our Committee this morning to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to thank them for that support and for their active interest and involvement in the search for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before I introduce for the Assembly's consideration the four resolutions prepared by our Committee under agenda item 14 of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, allow me to make some brief remarks as regards the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and developments in the political process.

The Committee is very concerned about the rapidly deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Again, it is the Palestinian population in Gaza that bears the brunt of this situation, but the Palestinian people as a whole endure daily hardship and humiliation as a direct consequence of the policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power.

The withdrawal of the Israeli army and settlers from the Gaza Strip last year did not create the anticipated and much-needed momentum for the resumption of the political dialogue between the parties. The Israeli Government did not engage the Palestinian Authority as a political partner, opting instead for a unilateral approach. The consequences of this are evident today.

There was no progress in the political area, either immediately after the pullout or in the course of the months that followed. The agreement on movement and access from and to Gaza existed largely on paper. The border crossings have remained closed for long periods of time, especially since last June. In the West Bank, the number of checkpoints has increased during this year by one third, effectively dividing the territory into three separated cantons. The results are painfully familiar: a stifled economy, rising unemployment and widespread poverty and despair among the Palestinian people.

This additional aggravation of the situation of the Palestinian people is accompanied by the already notorious practices of the occupying Power: intensified expansion of settlements in the West Bank, including around East Jerusalem with the "E1 plan" — a premeditated land confiscation of previously unseen proportions; the acceleration in the construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territory; continued Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres throughout the year; extrajudicial killings; house demolitions; daily arrests, including arbitrary detention of Palestinian Authority officials and Palestinian Legislative Council members. That has been compounded over the past few months by intensified air strikes and artillery and tank shelling of the Gaza Strip, with all of their deadly consequences for the innocent civilian population.

Speaking in the Security Council on 9 November 2006 and to the General Assembly, which met in an emergency special session on 17 November 2006, I expressed the Committee's strong condemnation of the Israeli incursions into Gaza, the grossly disproportionate use of force and the enormous and widespread devastation caused by the heavy weaponry. The Committee has also called on Palestinian groups to stop the firing of Qassam rockets and other weapons from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel, which has recently claimed the lives of two Israeli civilians and critically injured others. The Committee strongly condemns any act leading to the killing of innocent civilians by either side. It calls for an end to the spiral of violence, which will not contribute to reducing tensions or to creating conditions conducive to a resumption of peace negotiations.

The recently agreed ceasefire in Gaza, confirmed by the President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Ehud Olmert, is a very welcome sign that both parties wish to step back from the violence and put an end to the warfare. The ceasefire must be adhered to scrupulously by both parties. A favourable situation has thus now been created, and that precious advance must be strengthened, without delay, by tangible political steps that would demonstrate the intention of all concerned — including those in the field — to give dialogue and negotiations a real chance.

At this critical time, on behalf of the Committee, I call upon the Government of Israel to refrain from all actions that may destabilize the situation further, in particular its disproportionate use of military force and the settlement activity on Palestinian lands, including the construction of the West Bank wall. Israel will need to take steps to significantly improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians, in particular by lifting the curfew, easing restrictions on the movement of persons and goods and resuming the return of Palestinian tax payments that have been unjustly retained. The past year has clearly demonstrated that neither the use of force, nor unilateral steps will bring the parties any closer to a solution of the conflict.

Events in the wider Middle East region have only reconfirmed the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for peace and security in the region. The Committee continues to support the efforts by the Quartet to unblock the stalemate in the political process and to resume meaningful negotiations between the parties. It is encouraged by steps undertaken by major regional stakeholders, such as the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and some of its member States, to advance the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Non-Aligned Movement and other organizations have called for an international conference on peace in the Middle East. It would be desirable for that idea to gain momentum and be developed further in accordance with the concrete suggestions put forward by Spain and France.

Our Committee firmly believes that the United Nations, for its part, must continue to maintain its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine, until it is genuinely resolved in all its aspects. Here, it is particularly crucial for the Security Council to live up to its central role under the Charter for maintaining international peace and security. The request for monthly briefings on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question, is an expression of the Council's preoccupation with the conflict. What is needed, though, is concerted action towards the realization of its decisions.

Ultimately, it is the implementation of the United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), that will lead to a permanent two-State solution — Palestine and Israel — based on the 1967

borders, and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as they have been defined by this Assembly.

In that context, I would like to introduce to the General Assembly the four draft resolutions approved by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and circulated under the agenda item, namely A/61/L.31, A/61/L.32, A/61/L.33 and A/61/L.34. Allow me first to inform you that the following countries have associated themselves with the sponsors of the four draft resolutions as follows: the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sierra Leone with draft resolution A/61/L.31; Sierra Leone with draft resolution A/61/L.32; Sierra Leone and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) with draft resolution A/61/L.33 and finally Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) with draft resolution A/61/L.34.

The first three drafts deal with the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the tasks of the Division for Palestinian Rights, and the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information. The draft resolutions reaffirm the important mandates entrusted to those entities by the General Assembly. As in the past, the Committee intends to make sure that resources available to it are employed in a cost-effective manner for all mandated activities.

The fourth draft (A/61/L.34), entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", reiterates the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential elements of such a settlement and also includes references to the developments of the past year. In particular, this year's draft emphasizes the central role the Security Council should play in the efforts towards achieving a peaceful settlement of the question and encourages all actors of the international community, including the Quartet, to take immediate steps supporting the resumption of peace negotiations.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and programmes that are of special importance, particularly at the present critical stage. I would therefore like to call on the General Assembly to vote in favour of the draft resolutions and to support the important goals contained therein.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Victor Camilleri of Malta,

Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): In my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/61/35. Allow me to summarize each section of the report.

Chapter I contains the introduction, outlining the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates for the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments as monitored by the Committee during the year. This review includes the conduct of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006 and the swearing-in of the new Palestinian Government in March 2006; the reaction by the international community to the electoral results and subsequent cessation of major direct donor assistance; the withholding of Palestinian tax revenue transfers by Israel; the efforts by the Palestinian leadership to resolve the internal difficulties; the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, resulting in many casualties among Palestinians due to Israel's disproportionate use of force, but also among Israeli civilians following suicide bombings.

The chapter also deals with Israel's intensified military operations in the Gaza Strip and a further worsening of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and reviews other issues of concern to the Committee, including Israel's "convergence plan", the continued construction of the separation wall, the settlement expansion, the continued incarceration of Palestinians in Israeli detention facilities, the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians, and the operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In this chapter, the Committee strongly condemns the policy and practice of extrajudicial

killings of Palestinians, as well as all attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action in the Security Council, as well as statements issued by the Bureau of the Committee. It also contains information on the participation by the Chairman at international forums. Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division. It also provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union and other intergovernmental organizations.

Subsection 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized in the course of the year. Subsections 2 to 7 deal with the Committee's cooperation with intergovernmental organizations and civil society; research, monitoring and publications work of the Division; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 60/38 of 1 December 2005.

The last chapter of the report, chapter VII, contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter, the Committee expresses particular concern at the Israeli incursions into Gaza during the recent months and its destructive effects on the Palestinian people and on their hopes for peace. It reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which obliges the parties to protect civilians during hostilities. It calls on Israel to end its incursions into Gaza, cease offensive military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, withdraw its forces to their original positions outside Gaza, and release, immediately and unconditionally, all imprisoned cabinet members and parliamentarians, as well as other Palestinian prisoners.

The Committee strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side, denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for a cessation of these

activities by the Palestinian armed groups. The Committee strongly opposes the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and efforts to complete the construction of the wall on Palestinian land, as well as the Israeli Government's intention to expand large settlement blocks in the West Bank.

The Committee welcomes the signing of the National Conciliation Document by the major Palestinian political organizations, the decision to form a national unity government, and the designation of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as the person in charge of negotiations with Israel. It calls on the international community to focus on practical and meaningful benchmarks to engage all parties to achieve a mutual ceasefire and support major international peace efforts, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The Committee reiterates that only a negotiated solution can bring about the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee stresses that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and the general public on issues critical for advancing a peaceful settlement of the conflict. In this regard, the Committee intends to focus international events to be organized under its auspices in 2007 on a member of specific issues.

The Committee commends civil society organizations for the efforts at upholding international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. The Committee expresses its intention to work to involve parliamentarians in its programme of international meetings and conferences.

The Committee requests the Division for Palestinian Rights to continue its substantive and secretariat support; the programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and

development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the "Question of Palestine" web site; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Committee requests that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information be continued, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, the Committee, wishing to make a contribution to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, calls upon all States to join it in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

In closing, I would like to express the hope that the report I have just presented will be of assistance to the Assembly in its deliberations on the question of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, chairman of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine): Allow me at the outset to express our profound gratitude to you, Madam President, for your outstanding leadership and stewardship in presiding over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. At the same time, I have the pleasure to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, as well as the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights, for all their efforts and hard work of preservation, which make the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People an event of worldwide importance that is commemorated today in almost every country throughout the world.

On this important occasion, it is necessary to remember that it was due to the support of peace-loving nations that the Palestine Liberation Organization was recognized by the General Assembly, through its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, which reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the

Palestinian people in Palestine, including the right to self-determination without external interference and the right to national independence and sovereignty.

Throughout the 1980s, the support of peace-loving friendly nations was monumental in influencing governmental decisions in the right direction with a view to achieving peace and justice in the Middle East, with the question of Palestine occupying a central role in efforts to achieve peace and security in the whole Arab, Islamic and Mediterranean region.

Following the first Palestinian intifada, the Palestine National Council was held in Algiers in November 1988. It adopted the Declaration of Independence, which was duly recognized by the General Assembly on 15 December 1988. General Assembly resolution 43/177 acknowledged the proclamation of the State of Palestine by the Palestinian National Council on 15 November 1988 and decided that, as of that date, the designation "Palestine" should be used in place of the designation "Palestine Liberation Organization" (PLO) in the United Nations system, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and practice.

Throughout the 1990s, several peace initiatives were launched, starting with the Madrid Peace process, in 1991, which was followed by the Oslo Accords of 1993. That led to the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in the occupied Palestinian territory and all the ensuing agreements, such as the Wye Plantation and Taba agreements.

It is also worth noting that the Palestine Liberation Organization has always been prompt in accepting most of the international peace initiatives that have been proposed, and therefore that the responsibility for the failure and lack of implementation of most of those peace initiatives does not lie with the PLO.

At the beginning of this new century, Arab kings and heads of State unanimously adopted the Arab Peace Initiative during the 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut. That was followed by the Road Map launched by the Quartet, namely, the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations — a plan that is supposed to be implemented under their auspices and that to this day remains the main internationally recognized framework for achieving a peace settlement.

The Road Map was a creation of the United States in 2003, but was stillborn as a result of Sharon's 14 reservations, followed by the five guarantees given by President Bush to Sharon in 2004. This has impeded the realization of that initiative and has enabled Israel to proceed with its unilateral policy in which the Palestinian leadership was considered a non-partner.

The negative approach to peace of the United States and Israel led to the late President Arafat's being placed under house arrest for more than two years before he passed away under suspicious circumstances that suggested poisoning. No international body was designated to launch an investigation into his passing, despite the fact that several Israeli statements and declarations had characterized him as the main obstacle to peace and called for his removal and demise. This disregarded the fact that in 1993, Arafat and Rabin, his main partner in the peace process, had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Rabin was also assassinated by the Israelis. The guarantees offered by President Bush to Sharon on 14 April 2004 are one of the most recent examples of the ambiguous United States approach to peace.

By 2003, Israel, instead of starting to implement the steps required for a peaceful settlement in accordance with the Road Map, had intensified the building of the apartheid wall, which represents a grave violation of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention. On 21 October 2003, the General Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/13 following the Security Council's failure to adopt a binding resolution on that question. After the issuing of the Secretary-General's report (A/ES-10/248) concerning Israel's disregard of that resolution, the General Assembly, meeting in emergency special session — based on resolution 377 A (V) of 1950, entitled "Uniting for Peace" — convened on 8 December 2003. That meeting saw the adoption of resolution ES-10/14, requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the matter.

The hearings of the Court concerning the wall started on 23 February 2004 and ended with the issuing of the Court's advisory opinion on 9 July 2004, which called for the immediate cessation of the building of the separation wall. The wall stands 8 metres high and is designed to stretch over 800 kilometres, cutting Palestinian villages and cities off from one another and preventing farmers from reaching their lands and an

entire population from gaining access to most of its water resources. If completed, it will have a serious and dangerous impact on the lives and livelihoods of approximately 1 million Palestinian civilians, while resulting in the annexation of 55 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Advisory Opinion called on Israel's friends to consider it an outlaw State in case of non-compliance. Despite the Advisory Opinion's emanating from the highest international judicial body, Israel proceeded with its plan, and the wall, which was 185 kilometres long in 2004, has stretched to 388 kilometres two years later. This led a number of human rights organizations to send a letter to all the States Members of the United Nations requesting the Secretary-General to call for the resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which would call for the activation of the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion due to Israel's non-compliance with the will of the international community and its total disrespect and disregard for the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of July 2004.

In August 2005, however, the Israeli army decided to act unilaterally by evacuating its settlements and redeploying its military forces in Gaza. While pretending that it was withdrawing, it in fact kept its control over air and sea and over all land entrances to Gaza, besieging an already war-torn economy and a pauperized population.

In November 2005, a report on the difficult situation imposed by the Israeli occupation on the city of Jerusalem was issued by European diplomats living in Jerusalem and Ramallah, deducing that "Israel's activities in Jerusalem are in violation of both its road map obligations and international law". While Israel continues to suffocate the holy city of Jerusalem, it is also implementing its plans to annex the Jordan Valley through the expulsion of the Palestinian population from the Valley.

All such actions have been taken in order to fit in with Olmert's plan, which he had named the "convergence" plan and which meant, in fact, convergence towards permanent borders in the near future. Olmert's convergence plan involved keeping a hold on settlement blocs while evacuating other West Bank settlements.

Throughout 2005, repression in the occupied Palestinian territory increased on all fronts. Arrests and targeted assassinations were daily practices, and over 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners were still in Israeli jails, with Israel refusing to free them or to reconsider their cases through negotiations.

It is therefore imperative to emphasize that conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory had not improved, but rather deteriorated throughout a decade of painful and thorny negotiations since the launching of a lengthy and inconclusive process, starting with the Madrid initiative in 1991 and followed by the Oslo Accords of 1993 and all other related agreements.

Contrary to all agreements and peace initiatives, the building and expansion of settlements increased throughout the period of Ariel Sharon's Government, leading to the destruction of Palestinian livelihood through the bulldozing of a million olive trees, the destruction of orchards and 17,000 Palestinian homes, the restriction of movement for an already impoverished population and its deprivation of any possible means of livelihood, leading to an unprecedented high rate of unemployment, which reached 87 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory.

That stifling of the population increased while Israel, the occupying Power, invented all kinds of excuses to stall the peace process and, at the same time, never fulfilled the different mandates and time limits, using a policy of perpetual postponement of negotiations in order to avoid launching final status negotiations and making the realization of the two-State solution an impossible aim.

Such postponement and short-circuiting of the peace process, has been, unfortunately, approved and even reinforced by the dual policy of the United States, which, while encouraging different peace initiatives and offering to act as a sponsor or peace broker, has kept on approving and encouraging Israeli postponements, reservations and non-compliance with all such initiatives.

The year 2005 witnessed the United States experimentation with new formulas of democratic elections and the imposition of American-style elections on an exhausted population suffering from almost 40 years of occupation, instead of using its clout to impose the long-sought settlement, which, according to all United Nations resolutions, requires

the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces. In particular, Security Council resolution 242 (1967) emphasizes clearly the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and has called since 1967 for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the conflict, along with a series of other required measures to reach a peace settlement.

The results of the Palestinian legislative elections that were held in January 2006 upon United States persistence and insistence, disregarding the priority of ending the occupation, were apparently a severe blow to the United States dreams of finally dealing with a subservient new leadership that would follow a different policy than that followed by the late leader President Arafat.

Moreover, the results of the recent elections have in fact proved that the reading of the United States of the facts on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory was completely erroneous and that the impoverished Palestinian population had been frustrated by long years of inconclusive and futile negotiations that had led to a worsening of their human, social and economic situation. The wall was expanding; the checkpoints were increasing; assassinations, with all their collateral damage, including the murder of innocent children, were on the rise; the more than 10,000 prisoners languishing in Israeli jails were not being released; over a million olive trees had been uprooted and 17,000 homes destroyed; while the late President Arafat, the leader who had agreed to all the required concessions imposed on the Palestinian leadership through the Oslo Accords, had been removed.

Nothing in the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population between November 2004 and January 2006 had improved; in fact, things were getting worse. On 5 April 2006, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development published a study entitled "The Palestinian war-torn economy", calling for an international strategy to aid the Palestinian economy after 40 years of occupation and to engage on the path of sustainable development and State formation.

In April 2006, a United Nations document entitled "Assessment of the future humanitarian risks in the occupied Palestinian territory" was issued, warning of an extremely bleak humanitarian situation for the Palestinian people in the following months.

On 9 May 2006, the Quartet issued a declaration that pointed to the material aspects on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, such as the catastrophic and deteriorating humanitarian and social conditions. While taking into consideration all the positive elements, including those contained in the Quartet declarations, it did not specify that the main reason for the deterioration of these conditions was the perpetuation of Israel's miserable occupation.

Despite all the warnings issued in the first half of 2006 by responsible parties representing international legitimacy, concerning an impending worsening humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory due to a policy of collective punishment imposed on an unarmed civilian population, Israel, the occupying Power, continued to impose a policy of deliberate starvation, punishing the Palestinian people for simply electing their chosen representatives, which happened, unfortunately, to be not to the liking of Israel and the United States. These two highly moralistic Powers are of course free to choose their own representatives, even when they happen to be neoconservatives, evangelical zealots or racists calling for ethnic purification, as the new Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, and others have done.

Despite the worsening humanitarian situation, a horrendous terrorist massacre was perpetrated by the Israeli military forces against innocent unarmed besieged Palestinian civilians on a Gaza beach on 9 June 2006, when a poor Palestinian family picnicking on the beach was completely destroyed, leaving only one little orphan girl as a survivor. This massacre was perpetrated for no obvious logical reason, except perhaps to rekindle the fires of war in the impoverished Gaza Strip while providing an excuse to reoccupy the territory from which Sharon had withdrawn his military months before.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory had therefore acquired catastrophic dimensions on the political, economic and humanitarian levels when, on 25 June 2006, a desperate group of Palestinian militants single-handedly attempted to alleviate the blockade on the Palestinian population by attacking Sofa and Karam Salem, one of the checkpoints used to strangle the Palestinian population. This led to the deaths of two soldiers and the abduction of a third. The militants had hoped that by holding a prisoner of war they might gain leverage in a legal exchange of prisoners between the two sides. We are talking here

about only one Israeli soldier, while there are 10,000 Palestinian civilians in Israeli jails.

Instead of seeking to diffuse the crisis by accepting to relinquish some of the 10,000 prisoners, including women and children, held for years and even decades in their jails, in exchange for one Israeli prisoner — a military man — Israel again decided to proceed with additional war crimes, repeatedly raiding and pounding the civilian infrastructure in the already impoverished Gaza Strip, blowing up houses, bridges and electric power stations. According to article 54 of Additional Protocol I to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, such action constitutes a war crime, since it states clearly that it is prohibited to use starvation of a civilian population as a method of warfare and to attack, occupy and destroy the vital means of livelihood necessary for the survival of civilians.

On 13 July 2006, a Security Council meeting was held to consider the adoption of a draft resolution that would free the abducted Israeli soldier through an exchange involving Palestinian prisoners of war and to call for a ceasefire and a cessation of Israeli hostilities and military incursions in the Gaza Strip. But the United States kindly vetoed the draft. That of course made matters worse and led to the increase of violence at an unprecedented rate in the Gaza Strip. Concurrently, Israel pursued a policy of systematic abductions of elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which constituted another blatant violation of international legitimacy.

On 12 July 2006, Lebanese militants from the Lebanese resistance movement decided to abduct two Israeli soldiers from the Israeli army of occupation — which still occupies stretches of Lebanese land and which constantly harasses the civilian population in the south of Lebanon — hoping again to reach a fair deal in the exchange of the abducted soldiers for Lebanese prisoners of war.

Once again, Israel chose the course of war and destruction rather than entering into peaceful negotiations for an exchange of prisoners, and decided to indulge in a war of unprecedented destruction against the whole of the Lebanese civilian population.

Israel's failure to attain its aims in Lebanon after devastating it finally led the United States to accept Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) which called for a cessation of hostilities in Lebanon on 11 August 2006. In its paragraph 11, the resolution called upon

and authorized the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to deploy their forces in the south of the country and called upon the Government of Israel, in parallel, to withdraw all its forces from southern Lebanon as that redeployment began.

Several interpretations of that resolution followed, a current one being that it was accepted by the United States in order to save face for the Israeli army rather than to protect the Lebanese civilian population. However, consensus remains among the international community concerning the need for a parallel resolution for the Palestinian territory, that is, a resolution calling for a ceasefire, the cessation of all hostilities and the withdrawal of the Israeli army to recognized international borders, or at least to agreed-upon borders.

However, what is happening as far as Palestine is concerned is the opposite. Israeli raids, incursions, targeted assassinations, arrests and abductions of elected officials are daily activities, with such violent measures reaching a climax during the Beit Hanoun massacre of 8 November 2006, when innocent women and children were murdered while sleeping in their homes, as a result of the incessant ravages of Israeli raids.

Once again, the United States vetoed, on 11 November 2006, another resolution calling for an end to the hostilities and also condemning the Israeli-perpetrated massacre in Beit Hanoun.

Nevertheless, the General Assembly — meeting on 17 November 2006 at its tenth emergency special session — adopted, by 156 votes in favour, a resolution condemning the massacre, thereby proving once again that all of the free and peace-loving nations of the world are on the side of justice and fairness and do not fall into the trap of bias, one-sidedness and double standards, as expressed by the United States veto in the Security Council.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the Human Rights Council has twice adopted resolutions calling for the dispatch of fact-finding missions to the occupied Palestinian territory, despite Israel's continued rejection of such missions. The last such resolution was adopted on 15 November 2006.

The inability of the United Nations to implement its own resolutions and its tendency to succumb to the

various diversionary tactics used by the United States and Israel has given rise to a sense of disillusionment among all Palestinians concerning the role of the United Nations as peacemaker and peacekeeper with respect to the question of Palestine — a role it has been playing since 1947.

We therefore find it necessary at this point to draw the attention of the members of the Quartet to certain logical flaws concerning the implied responsibility of the present democratically elected Palestinian National Authority Government — a Government elected under their own supervision — for the continuation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and for the failure of the peace process, overlooking the fact that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are still occupied territories and that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to take all kinds of violent and repressive actions against an unarmed civilian population.

Despite the Palestine Liberation Organization's acquiescence to all the conditions included in the various peace initiatives, consecutive Israeli Governments have continued to carry out repressive policies of all kinds and collective punishment against the unarmed Palestinian population, starting with the breaking of bones and followed by a policy of assassinations, arrests, preventive detentions and the imposition of military curfews, sieges and inhuman checkpoints, and, finally, by the building of the apartheid wall, whose stranglehold has transformed Palestinian cities and towns into huge, collective prison cells and ghettos.

Unfortunately, the Quartet, which has the responsibility of applying the Road Map plan of 2003, has obviously not made the efforts required to put it into actual application. Its deeds remain at the level of rhetorical statements and inconclusive meetings and press statements.

Despite the positive and encouraging stand of the Russian Federation, one of the Quartet's main partners, which has always expressed a firm and principled stand in support of justice and peace in the Middle East, and in spite of the advanced positions expressed by various European countries, such as Spain, Italy and France, which have recently put forth a new initiative for the holding of an international conference, the actual implementation of practical measures to end the occupation has until now been stalled. No real pressure

has been exerted on Israel, the occupying Power, to implement its side of the agreements, despite the fact that European nations have the moral and material power to do so.

The use by Western countries of moral standards that are unfair and of a terminology that often equates the victim with the aggressor, and an occupied, repressed and unarmed population with the Israeli army of occupation, the fourth most powerful army in the world — not to mention the fact that Israel is a nuclear Power — has been frustrating to the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Palestinians suffer not only from the consequences of occupation and poverty but also from the injustice of a new world order that not only confuses the aggressor with the aggressed but also blames the weaker side and accuses it of terrorist acts, not daring to describe as acts of terror the murderous, devastating warfare launched by powerful armies against civilian populations and infrastructures, and ignoring the legal distinction between resistance against occupation and terrorism.

Once again, it is necessary to point out that the responsibility for the failure to proceed with the implementation of the Road Map, which was supposed to have reached its final stages in 2005 — President Bush postponed it to 2009 — does not lie with the Palestinian side, since the whole initiative was stillborn owing to Sharon's 14 reservations, as I mentioned earlier, and the assurances that were later granted to him by President Bush himself in April 2004 in order to guarantee his re-election.

Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize, at this critical juncture, the fact that the Palestine Liberation Organization has recognized all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as the main peace initiatives, especially the latest Road Map plan. It staunchly adheres to international legitimacy and legality while still firmly believing in the capacity of the Quartet — which represents the main great military as well as moral Powers of today's world — to implement it, through the acquiescence of the two main parties to the conflict, namely the Palestine Liberation Organization, as the main legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the State of Israel, which, in its capacity as the occupying Power and as the most powerful party to the conflict, retains primary control of the means of resolving the conflict.

On that basis, we think that it is unnecessary and perhaps even futile for the international community to concentrate so many efforts and exert so much energy in pressuring the Palestinian National Authority Government, which is a local Government and has only local and limited powers, by imposing all forms of collective punishment on the totality of the Palestinian people, instead of pooling all our energies to solve the crux of the problem by calling for the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces and relieving the Palestinian population from all the pain they are enduring.

We have come to the United Nations today, still holding the olive branch, as did our late President in 1974. Past events, however, as well as the current configuration of forces, have proved that more than good will is required to achieve peace. A firm stand and actions are needed, so that international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions can finally be adequately implemented. We firmly believe that the United Nations is capable of protecting the ever-suffering Palestinian population by insisting on the deployment of its forces in the Palestinian territory. The Organization does so in other parts of the world, such as in the Sudan, where it is currently insisting on deployment, against the will of the Sudanese Government. It does so in spite of the short time span of the conflict there, compared to the lengthy ordeal imposed on and the war crimes committed against the Palestinian people over the last 40 years.

We, therefore, call on the international community to support the Palestinian cause for peace, so that the year 2007, which will mark the fortieth year of occupation, will see progress along the road to the achievement of a just and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, allowing the Palestinians to exercise their inalienable rights and to establish their fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State. This would finally allow them and their neighbours to live in peace and harmony and would be in the best interest of world peace, stability and security.

I wish all delegates peace in the forthcoming year.

Ms. Núñez Mordoché (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

On this past 11 November, we commemorated the second anniversary of Yasser Arafat's passing. The historical leader of the Palestinian people died without seeing his great dream and that of his people come true. That same day, in a remembrance ceremony at his tomb, the current President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, said that peace and security could not be achieved under occupation and colonization.

Unfortunately, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is a goal that is still very hard to accomplish, owing to the Israeli occupation. Today we are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people; this is a day in which the international community reaffirms its support of this heroic people's efforts to exercise its self-determination and achieve independence.

The situation in the Palestinian occupied territory has continued to deteriorate in the last few months. The Israeli incursions in the Gaza Strip have caused even more deaths and a considerable worsening of the humanitarian situation, the most recent example being the massacre at Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006, which claimed the lives of 19 Palestinians, among them eight children and seven women, with another 55 injured.

In view of the gravity of such events and the standstill in the Security Council as a consequence of the exercise of veto by one of its permanent members, the General Assembly resumed its tenth emergency special session and considered the issue. The resolution adopted on that occasion by the vast majority of Member States calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease its military attacks against the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to immediately withdraw its forces from within the Gaza Strip to the positions occupied prior to 28 June 2006; it also calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to scrupulously abide by its obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, with respect to the Palestinian occupied territory, including East Jerusalem.

Likewise, the resolution requests the Secretary-General to establish a fact-finding mission to investigate the attack that took place in Beit Hanoun on

8 November 2006 and to report to the General Assembly within 30 days. We are awaiting the results of said investigation and stress the need and urgency for full compliance with the resolution adopted by the General Assembly, in all its aspects.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern about the constant deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power.

The economic, social and humanitarian crisis that the Palestinian people endure and the isolation of the Gaza Strip are worsening, particularly after the implementation of Israel's unilateral separation plan. The Non-Aligned Movement condemns the continued imposition of illegal policies and collective punishment against the Palestinian people. Israel must stop the occupation and its illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the illegal construction of the wall, which is aimed at seizing and annexing Palestinian land and property and modifying the demographic and geographic composition of the Palestinian territory.

The Movement reiterates its call to Israel to immediately stop the military operations, the acts of violence and provocation, as well as the bombings against the Palestinian population. The Movement requests the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation troops from the Gaza Strip, Israel's fulfilment of its responsibility to repair all damages caused to the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, and the immediate release of all Palestinian officials detained by Israel since 28 June 2006.

We call upon all States and the international community as a whole to provide urgent economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people to alleviate its current financial and humanitarian crisis.

The member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, once again, call upon the Security Council to take up its responsibilities, implement its own resolutions and take the necessary steps so that Israel respects international law and ends the occupation and the illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory. It is unacceptable that the Security Council continues to fail in the fulfilment of its permanent responsibility regarding the Palestinian question, while the question remains unsolved in all its

aspects, on the basis of international law. The unilateral measures taken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, represent a serious threat to the prospects for peace and the achievement of a negotiated agreement based on a two-State solution.

The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to support the Palestinian people and their leadership with a view to putting an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We reaffirm our unswerving commitment to a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Grönberg (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomes the agreement between President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza. It is a promising first step on a path towards a sustainable peace. We call upon both parties to adhere strictly to their commitments and avoid hasty actions which could jeopardize progress towards a sustained period of calm. The European Union encourages both parties to endeavour to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

The European Union urges the Palestinians to work towards national unity and to form a Government with a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement. Such a Government of national unity would also be a partner for the international community to support in the re-launching of the peace process.

The European Union expresses serious concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and financial situation in the occupied Palestinian

territories. We emphasize the importance of the implementation by both parties of the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005. We call on Israel also to respect previous agreements and to fulfil its obligations under them. We insist on the particular importance of regular operations at Gaza crossings, notably Rafah, and call on Israel to do its utmost to ensure that the crossings are opened and remain open. We also repeat our call on Israel to immediately resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues.

The European Union reiterates its intention to contribute actively to the work of the Quartet to get the Middle East peace process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Road Map, relevant Security Council resolutions and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005. This should be done in close cooperation with Arab partners. The international community must provide its full support to the parties in this respect.

The European Union reaffirms that it will not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by both parties. We recall the urgent need to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The European Union remains committed to the two-State solution as laid out in the Road Map and agreed between the parties, which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel living within recognized and secure borders.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to you, Madam, for your wise management of this important meeting, and to express our sincere appreciation for the tireless efforts of His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee, to achieve justice for the Palestinian cause.

On this, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the leadership, Government and people of the United Arab Emirates with the brotherly Palestinian people in their just struggle to

achieve their legitimate aspirations for ending the occupation of their land and deciding their destiny, just like any other people in the world.

Anyone who has followed the various stages of the Palestinian question — especially since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which divided Palestine into two States, one Palestinian, the other Israeli, and with the adoption of other resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), Palestinian-Israeli agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, all of which endorsed the idea of the establishment of those two States in the region — must be disappointed by the continued obstructionist policies pursued to date by successive Israeli Governments to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

There is also deep regret as a result of Israel's continued escalation of aggression and occupation and its gross violations of the human rights of unarmed Palestinian civilians. This includes crimes of genocide, armed aggression, the systematic destruction of homes, property and the national infrastructure, and the arbitrary arrest of thousands of people and the imposition of complete blockades of cities and villages in an attempt to isolate people from the outside world and prevent them from gaining access to emergency food, medical and relief assistance.

The United Arab Emirates considers the illegal measures implemented by successive Israeli Governments against the Palestinian people to be a clear demonstration of Israel's expansionist designs aimed at consolidating its occupation of the Palestinian territories. How otherwise could the conscience of humanity explain those offensive measures? Indeed, those measures coincided with the Israeli Government's decision to obstruct peace negotiations with the Palestinians; to expand its frantic illegal campaign of settler colonialism in the Arab and Palestinian territories, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, changing its demographic, legal and Arab character and tampering with its Holy Places; and, before final status negotiations can begin, to draw new borders on spurious grounds at the expense of the original inhabitants — all in flagrant violation of internationally binding resolutions.

We wish to express our concern over the international community's inability to date to

implement the United Nations resolutions aimed at addressing the illegal Israeli violations, which have resulted in increased misery and despair among the Palestinian and Arab people. Today, we reiterate once again the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, in accordance with its Charter mandate, to address the Palestinian cause, which we consider to be the core of the conflict in the Middle East.

We also emphasize that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement cannot be achieved if the world continues to be silent in the face of the ongoing Israeli violations of the Palestinians' inalienable rights. It can be achieved only by taking all necessary measures to pressure the Israeli Government to undertake a full and unconditional withdrawal from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and by solving the problem of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Arab peace initiative, the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and the road map principles. In that context, we also emphasize the primacy of the following issues.

First, necessary and urgent international protection must be provided for the Palestinian people, and a special mechanism to investigate the recent Israeli crimes established. A system must be developed to prevent impunity and ensure justice, including reparations for damages.

Secondly, we must call on Israel urgently to lift all closures, blockades and restrictions imposed on the movement of personal goods in all Palestinian territories, and promptly to release scores of Palestinian prisoners, including children, women and members of the Palestinian Government.

Thirdly, the international community must condemn all settlement activities and unilateral measures undertaken by Israel in all Palestinian territories, particularly East Jerusalem, and require Israel to abrogate those measures immediately, in compliance with its obligations under international law and United Nations resolutions, including the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Fourthly, Israel must be urged to abolish all laws and jurisdictions imposed over Jerusalem — including the Basic Law declaring Jerusalem the capital of

Israel — and to halt the transfer of diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, restrictions on the movement of the original inhabitants, the confiscation of their lands and possessions, and other measures aimed at profaning holy places, preventing people from exercising their religious practices, and isolating the city from other Arab land. All such measures must be declared null and void and recognized for their negative impact on the lives of Palestinians and on the possibility of establishing a viable independent Palestinian State in the region.

Fifthly, all Member States, especially major donors, must resume the provision of all political, economic, humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority in order to prepare the ground for a new national Government that can meet the urgent basic needs of the Palestinian people, alleviate the worsening humanitarian crisis, and rebuild Palestine's economy and the structures of its fundamental national institutions.

The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns Israel's continued occupation of the Lebanese Shab'a farms and the Syrian Golan Heights, and its policies in the Golan, which include the seizure of more than 96 per cent of lands, the destruction of all facets of life, the expansion of settlement activities, the planting of mines, the destruction of the environment, the laying of continuous siege to the Syrians, the imposition of exorbitant taxes, coercive detentions and arrests, the denial of medical and educational services, and the distortion of educational curricula relating to the geography and history of the Golan. In that context, we support the legitimate demands of the Syrian Arab Republic for the restoration of the Golan, an integral part of its national sovereignty, and we call upon the international community to take urgent action to force Israel to abolish all such illegal and coercive measures taken in the Syrian Golan.

Finally, we look with optimism to the truce declared recently by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and hope that it will include the West Bank. We also emphasize that the next phase requires an urgent response from the Security Council and the Quartet to the recent initiative of the League of Arab States, which calls for a more effective role in reinvigorating the Arab-Israeli peace tracks in order to break the spiral of violence, restore Arab and Palestinian lands and rights, and reach a just and peaceful settlement of

the Palestinian question in accordance with the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. That will help to establish security, stability and peaceful coexistence among all countries of the region. We also call upon the international community to continue its support to the United Nations agencies and committees involved in support for the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people, including the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

We hope that all members will vote in favour of the draft resolutions before the General Assembly regarding the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my country's delegation, I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman for their tireless efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people can enjoy the inalienable rights recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

I also thank the Chairman for his excellent introduction of the Committee's report, which describes the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and other related political issues.

The report before us in document A/61/35, even in its general outlines, clearly reveals the catastrophic situation in the occupied territories. The deteriorating overall situation in the territories has been widely reflected in the international media, as noted in paragraph 25 of the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, contained in document A/61/500, concerning the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/31/35) refers to this continuing deterioration of the situation due to Israel's ongoing military activities, which are intensifying day by day.

There is no doubt that the present military aggression is but the latest phase in a long series that began with the Israeli occupation of Arab territories in 1967. The occupation forces have created very grave consequences for all of us. What complicates matters even more is that such aggressive acts are coupled with massacres committed by the occupying forces without the slightest regard for international law, legal instruments and agreed norms. I would cite in particular the recent Beit Hanoun massacre, which followed an Israeli statement declaring Israel's intentions to cease all military operations — intentions which are now a dead letter. At the same time the Secretary-General, in his statement on 8 November 2006, declared that he was shocked to have learned of what had happened at Beit Hanoun and of the many victims resulting from that Israeli military operation.

Unfortunately, the Security Council remained silent and impassive in the face of this massacre and did not even deplore or condemn it. This prompts Israel to believe that it is above the law and makes it more intransigent. As such it continues its acts of aggression while conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to deteriorate. Tensions have reached unprecedented levels because of repressive measures taken by Israeli military forces in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 12 August 1949, which concerns the protection of civilians in time of war.

Israel, however, is in violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, as is emphasized in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories (A/61/470), particularly in paragraph 64. In reply, Israel continues to cast doubt on those reports, which, however, are based on verified facts. When it cannot refute such facts, it resorts to justifying its actions as necessary security measures.

The report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (A/61/67, annex) states in paragraph 11 that during the year 2005 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was able to report that the Israeli army destroyed 224 Palestinian structures in the West Bank. In paragraph 15 the report also mentions that in 2005 the Israeli authorities demolished at least 114 Palestinian houses in occupied Jerusalem in the framework of its plan to conduct 1,000 demolition operations.

That makes us ask why the Israeli authorities have not complied with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 9 July 2004, which underscored the illegality of the construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and its surroundings. The Court clearly stated that this was totally in contradiction of international law, which stresses the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the land of others by force or undertaking activities of a sovereign nature that are intended to change the geographical status of a country.

The ESCWA report emphasizes in paragraph 35 that, contrary to Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, Israel is continuing the construction of the wall according to the new route approved by the Israeli Government in February 2005. Unless it is stopped, the revised route will encircle an additional area of 40 kilometres and will include Ariel/Emmanuel and other independent settlements. Those two sectors comprise 15 per cent of the total 670-kilometre length of the wall and will then absorb about 10 per cent of the territory of the West Bank on the western side of the wall and will make it possible for 75 per cent of the settlers to live west of the wall.

While those Israeli settlements are illegal and are condemned by the international community and by the International Court of Justice — which stated that it was illegal to build the wall — the Israeli Government is continuing to expand those settlements. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People noted in paragraph 28 of its report (A/61/35) that Israel is continuing relentlessly to expand the settlements, thus flouting Security Council resolution 476 (1980), which was aimed at obstructing pending legislation to make Jerusalem the eternal capital of Israel. Council resolution 478 (1980) determined that Israeli legislative and administrative measures designed to change the character and status of Jerusalem, especially the “basic law” on Jerusalem, are null and void.

In many cases, as reports have shown, the expansion of settlements continues under the pretext of natural expansion. As a result, there are now 260,000 settlers in the West Bank, while in East Jerusalem the number totals approximately 200,000. The separation wall in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is being constructed in a manner that allows it to integrate the majority of the settlements on its west side. The three

large blocks of settlements — Gush Etzion, Ma’ale Adumim and Ariel — will, in fact, be cutting up Palestinian territories into cantons and isolating them from each other, clearly undermining the unity and territorial integrity of Palestine.

The issue of Palestine is at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. A solution must be found that is consonant with United Nations resolutions and in conformity with the Millennium Declaration and with international instruments that stress the right of colonized and occupied peoples to self-determination and to work to establish a just and lasting peace throughout the world in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

Peace is a strategic choice. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace requires the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Such a peace also requires that all of the agreements and commitments undertaken be honoured, as well as the results of the 1991 Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative, the implementation of the Road Map and the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Elbakly (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly meets today to consider the question of Palestine, a question for which the international community has failed to find a solution for more than half of a century. During this period, the suffering of the Palestinian people and the denial of their legitimate rights and territory has continued, owing to Israel’s intransigence and its refusal to allow the Palestinians to create their own State and exercise their right to self-determination.

Today’s meeting also takes place shortly after the convening of the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly to discuss Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territory. At that session a clear message was sent that no State was above the law. That session followed the failure by the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by putting an end to Israeli violations, owing to the use of the right of veto by one permanent member of the Council. Further, that session followed Israel’s failure to achieve its objectives in Palestine and Lebanon through military means, and also its failure to comprehend the letter and spirit of the Arab message of

peace articulated during the special ministerial session of the Security Council on 21 September 2006. Therefore, today's meeting is of particular importance in reaffirming the support of the General Assembly — the most democratic organ of the United Nations — for the rights of the Palestinian people and their legitimate demands for a peaceful and just settlement, by ending the occupation and providing international protection for Palestinian civilians.

On that basis, we wish to underline the importance of enhancing the role and mandate of the General Assembly in addressing the Palestinian question. Efforts towards peace, liberty and equality should prevail, through the implementation of all resolutions dealing with Palestine, in order to ensure Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory and the other Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, at the forefront of which are their rights to life, security and self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Similarly, enhancing the ability of the General Assembly to strengthen international respect for human rights in a framework devoid of selectivity, politicization and double standards necessitates the implementation of practical measures to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people and to break the wall of silence towards the continued violations of Palestinian rights, including the siege and closure of crossing points and roads, hindering the supply of food and humanitarian assistance, the expansion of settlements, territorial confiscation and construction of the separation wall despite the legal Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the matter.

In that context, Egypt highlights the importance of implementing a number of confidence-building measures and actions with the support of the international community in order to realize a new political horizon through the relaunching of final status negotiations with a view to achieving a just, comprehensive and final solution to the question of Palestine, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, an updated Road Map with new specific timelines, and the implementation of United Nations resolutions and other relevant peace process terms of reference. In that regard, we call upon Israel to abandon its policy of unilateral withdrawal from

negotiations, under the pretext of the lack of a peace partner. We also call upon the Quartet to reactivate its role and to formulate a clear vision for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

In addition to the efforts by the international community and regional parties, the Israelis and Palestinians have the responsibility of supporting steps aimed at restoring confidence and returning to the negotiating table. In that regard, we welcome the agreement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government to cease hostilities, as a necessary first step towards confidence-building, and in which Egypt is actively involved — through the release of the abducted Israeli soldier in return for Palestinian prisoners, and the release of Palestinian officials and parliamentarians.

We also look forward to further steps that will break the cycle of violence and counter-violence and that will lead to the cessation of the repeated Israeli assaults on the Palestinian people and the redeployment of Israeli forces to their positions before 28 June 2006 in the Gaza Strip. We also look forward to the opening of border crossing points, especially the Rafah crossing point, and to improving the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory, in addition to the halting of the construction of the separation wall and the implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access to facilitate the freedom of movement of Palestinians, and to allow for the continued provision of humanitarian assistance to them.

Egypt will spare no effort in supporting endeavours to move the peace process forward and will participate effectively in all efforts to achieve the unity of the Palestinian people and to form a Government of national unity that serves the aspirations of the Palestinian people to realize peace and development. All should be done that can lead to the relaunching of the peace process.

Egypt also supports international and regional efforts aimed at ending the stagnation of the peace process, and calls upon the leading international Powers to take serious steps in that direction. We appreciate initiatives by some countries to present new ideas and visions that would lead to resumption of negotiations, such as the latest Spanish, French and Italian initiative, which we are following with great interest, in addition to calls to convene an international

peace conference to relaunch the peace process and renew the commitment to the principle of land for peace and to all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We are deeply concerned about the continued lack of a solution to the Palestinian question throughout these many years. The international community's commitment to achieve international peace and security must promote, in an effective manner, the realization of the two-State solution, and ensure the sincere and just implementation of United Nations resolutions, the Road Map and other terms of reference without selectivity or bias, leading to a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, which will produce stability in the Middle East and reaffirm the success of the United Nations in achieving the principles and values upon which it was established.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The discussion in the General Assembly of the question of Palestine during its annual meeting, and in accordance with a tradition that goes back more than 50 years, is particularly important this year, given the current dangers in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Middle East in general.

From this rostrum, and like a great number of peaceful States working for peace, Tunisia has tirelessly warned of the dangerous threat in the region after the setbacks to the peace process, owing to a lack of commitment to agreements concluded with the Palestinian side and to the halt in negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts. That is a clear disavowal of the terms of reference of the peace process and its fundamental principles.

During the past few months, the occupied Palestinian territory has been the theatre of a dangerous Israeli military escalation in which the occupying forces have resorted to excessive violence. The most recent example of that violence is the atrocious massacre carried out in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip, which claimed the lives of many innocent people, women and children. Such repeated acts of aggression are carried out in flagrant violation of the principles of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in time of war.

We cannot fail to welcome the truce agreed to recently by the Palestinian and Israeli sides. It is our

hope that it will be respected by the parties and will be followed by other positive measures — specifically, a complete withdrawal by Israeli forces from the occupied Palestinian territories, a lifting of the embargo imposed on the Palestinians, the freeing of prisoners and a commitment to genuine negotiations leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of this long-lasting conflict. A just and comprehensive peace in the region requires full and unconditional withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and the other occupied Lebanese territories in accordance with the relevant resolutions and terms of reference.

Tunisia, which has been following with great concern the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, is totally convinced of the justice of the Palestinian cause. Therefore, we shall continue to lend our full support to the Palestinian people to ensure that they recover their legitimate rights, including the right to establish their own independent State on their national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Given the dangerous situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Tunisia calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and to play an effective role in protecting the defenceless Palestinian people. In that regard, we reiterate that international observers should be sent to protect the Palestinian people, as reaffirmed by His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the Arab Summit held in Cairo in 1998. Tunisia also calls on the influential parties involved, in particular the Quartet, to shoulder their responsibilities and to ask Israel to respond to the peace process on the basis of the relevant international resolutions. That must be carried out in harmony with tireless Arab efforts to enable the Palestinians to fulfil their legitimate aspirations to freedom, dignity, peace and security in the region.

The United Nations, in particular the General Assembly, bears responsibility towards the Palestinian people, and that responsibility must be shouldered, because this forum is the guarantor and protector of the foundations of international legitimacy. That political role must be pursued with a view to reaching a just and final settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict. While the General Assembly is considering those mandates, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the need to maintain and support the mandates related to the Palestinian question and the situation in

the Middle East, given the sensitive nature of that question, in order to arrive at a just and comprehensive settlement.

Finally, I wish to express our appreciation for the continued efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, led by its Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, to strengthen the role of the United Nations and settle this issue once and for all.

Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is considering one of the most important items on its agenda because of its close relationship to international peace and security. The Middle East region, despite its vitality and importance, has not been stable for decades, as a result of successive wars and conflicts and the depletion of its energies and resources.

A major challenge facing the region and threatening its peace and stability is the Israeli Government's persistence in its illegal policies and practices of aggression. The Israeli Government has adopted an approach based on the use of force to impose security, while it continues its occupation of territories. That formula, which has proved a failure, can only lead to further deterioration of the security situation by fuelling feelings of hatred and the continuing cycle of violence and instability.

These Israeli practices have now reached an intolerable level. Israeli military incursions into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have become a routine daily occurrence. The killing of innocent civilians, including women and children, has become ordinary news that no longer shocks the international community or prompts it to take immediate action to put an end to these practices, which violate international laws and norms. During the past few weeks, the Israeli forces committed massacres in Beit Hanoun and other areas of the occupied Arab territories. Kuwait has strongly condemned that military offensive, which caused severe losses in terms of lives and property.

Given these Israeli practices, we wonder whether the civilized nations that defend human rights can accept acts such as extrajudicial assassinations; the excessive and indiscriminate use of military force; the destruction of Palestinian homes and institutions; the closure of crossings; the continued policy of siege and collective punishment; the collective arbitrary arrests

and humiliating treatment of those held in Israeli prisons; and the continued construction of the separation wall, despite the legal opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004, which states that the wall is illegal and contradicts the resolutions of international legitimacy. The opinion also calls upon Israel to remove the wall and compensate the Palestinians harmed by its construction.

All those practices represent clear and flagrant violations of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in time of war. We believe that the States signatory to that Convention must undertake concrete measures to enforce its provisions and compel Israel to respect those provisions. In that regard, we welcome the most recent resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session (resolution ES-10/16), particularly given the overwhelming support of the international community, for that resolution, after the Security Council had failed to shoulder its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security owing to the repeated use of the right of veto by one permanent Council member.

Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover its full political rights so as to establish its own independent State on its own territory, with Jerusalem as its capital. We reiterate that, without the restoration of the full legitimate rights of the Palestinian people — in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative — there can be no comprehensive, just and lasting peace or resolution of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, we call upon the international community as well as the Quartet to apply pressure on the Israeli Government to convince it that there will not be a military solution to the crisis, and that the only solution resides in a return to the negotiating table and the relaunching of the peace process leading to a full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy and the provisions of the Road Map.

Last summer, Lebanon was exposed to flagrant Israeli aggression that caused hundreds of innocent

civilian deaths and thousands of injuries. The destruction of numerous homes, bridges and civil institutions and the deliberate targeting of the country's infrastructure was an organized act of State terrorism and in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. Kuwait has strongly condemned those shameful and inhumane crimes and expedited emergency humanitarian relief to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese people. It has also made financial contributions to the reconstruction of what was destroyed by the Israeli aggression.

While Kuwait welcomes other measures adopted by the international community in implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), it calls upon Israel to put an end to its repeated aggression against Lebanon and its sovereignty and to respect Lebanon's independence and territorial integrity. Kuwait also calls upon the international community to assist and support the Lebanese Government in extending its authority over the entire territory of Lebanon and to support Lebanon's quest for the full restoration of its rights, including the right to adequate compensation for the harm inflicted upon it by the Israeli aggression.

Kuwait reaffirms the illegality of Israeli activities in the occupied Golan and reiterates its demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. Kuwait also reaffirms its position that the continued occupation and annexation of the Golan represents an intractable obstacle to the realization of a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

In the current Middle East environment, we can only hold onto the latest glimmer of hope, namely, the truce declared between the Palestinian President, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister in the Gaza Strip. While we welcome that ceasefire, we would also like to encourage both parties to extend it to include the West Bank. We also urge both sides to take responsible measures to preserve the truce, avoid acts of aggression and resist any temptation to be swayed by extremists who seek to destroy all attempts to restore confidence between Palestinians and Israelis.

We also hope that that ceasefire will constitute a first step and a prelude to the resumption of the negotiating process, with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace settlement that will lead the entire region to the security and stability to which it

aspires. We further hope that the Israeli Government will finally realize that the basic demand for security is not only an Israeli right but it is also a right for all other countries of the region. Israel does not have a monopoly on that right.

Such a vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict is part and parcel of the foreign policy of Kuwait, which favours a Middle East based on stability, mutual respect and cooperation among all parties. Such stability will certainly require confidence-building measures, foremost of which would be an agreement declaring the Middle East region a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

Mr. Swar-Aldahab (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me to congratulate you once again for your wise conduct of the discussions of the General Assembly since the beginning of this session.

My delegation has viewed with interest the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People contained in document A/61/35, the report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) contained in document A/61/13, and the report of the Secretary-General on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine contained in document A/61/355. We have also taken note of the report by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, on the situation in the Middle East, submitted to the Security Council on 21 November 2006.

My country follows with great concern the developments in the Palestinian territories as reflected in the media and in the reports that I just mentioned. The successive developments reflecting the magnitude of Palestinian suffering, the most recent of which was the massacre at Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006, reflects the urgent need for international intervention to put an end to such suffering. Regrettably, we would like to draw attention to the Security Council's inability to take responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security with respect to this incident, owing in large part to the use of the right of veto by a certain permanent member despite the fact that the draft resolution was balanced. On the other hand, we commend the General Assembly's adoption by an overwhelming majority of a resolution to

dispatch an international fact-finding mission to look into the incident within one month.

The unprecedented Legislative Council elections involving 77 per cent of the electorate and took place under the supervision of 20,000 national observers and 1,000 international observers, including observers from the European Union, the Carter Center/National Democratic Center Institute and the Canadian Government. Since then, and since the Palestinian Government's assumption of its functions, the Palestinian people have been subjected to several measures by the Israeli occupation aimed at undermining the Palestinian Authority. Those measures include efforts to consolidate its control over East Jerusalem and other strategic areas in the West Bank, military incursions into the Gaza Strip, air raids and artillery bombardments and the indiscriminate arrest of Palestinian Authority officials, including members of the Legislative Council. Other arbitrary measures include closures, demolition of houses and destruction of the infrastructure and the hasty construction of the illegal separation wall, in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

In this connection, we would like to note the recommendation that the Secretary-General established a register of all the damages suffered by all of the individuals and entities affected by the construction of the wall so that they can be compensated.

Other measures taken by the Israeli occupiers in response to the Palestinian elections include the withholding of customs and value-added tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority, resulting in a severe financial crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A number of reports, including by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), state that there has been a severe deterioration in terms of the economy, availability of foodstuffs, agricultural exports and security, prompting the League of Arab States and some Governments to provide emergency financial aid to the Palestinian Authority to help it to overcome the profound crisis. In this regard, we would like to call upon all donors and the international community to review their policies on assistance to the Palestinian Authority and to bring pressure to bear on Israel to release all revenue and customs transfers to the Palestinian Authority in order to halt the deterioration of the humanitarian situation suffered by the Palestinian people.

The number of prisoners and detainees — including women, children and high-level Palestinian officials — in Israeli prisons has now reached 10,100. They are exposed to serious health risks and suffer humiliation and torture. As the Secretary-General has said, the detention of Palestinian officials who were freely and democratically elected is a particular cause for concern.

The Israeli Prime Minister's declaration that he intends to take unilateral steps to delineate the borders of Israel prompted the Quartet to state that such unilateral measures must not affect final status negotiations. We appeal to the international community to put pressure on Israel to end such measures, which violate international laws and norms, before any final status discussions can take place.

Given the deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories, my delegation would like to commend UNRWA and its programme of assistance to the Palestinian people, the World Food Programme and other United Nations agencies working in the Palestinian territories to alleviate the daily suffering of the Palestinian people. We call on the United Nations Department of Public Information to make greater efforts to undertake programmes to provide the international community with basic information on the issue.

We have also taken note of the measures adopted by the Security Council and statements issued by international conferences on Palestine and by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We would like to appeal to all members of the international community to continue to show concern over the question of Palestine, as it is at the heart of the situation in the Middle East.

On this, the day when we express our solidarity with the Palestinian people and its struggle to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital — a commemorative event organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — we reaffirm our solidarity with and support for our brothers in Palestine, and make clear once again that the question of Palestine is the crux of the conflict in the Middle East and that the Security Council should shoulder its responsibility to preserve international peace and security and take immediate and decisive measures to compel Israel to withdraw, immediately and unconditionally, from all occupied

Palestinian territories in implementation of all international resolutions, and to take advantage of the declared ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict.

Mr. Algahrah (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like, first of all, to thank Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for all of the efforts that he and the other members of the Committee have made. We would like to take the opportunity today — the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — to reaffirm the solidarity of the Kingdom and the people of Saudi Arabia with the Palestinian people.

We have no doubt about the capacity of Israel to invent excuses and justifications for launching repeated hostilities and to cause confusion and chaos in the region, especially in Palestine, by exacerbating tensions. Indeed, the facts show that Israel is not truly trying to bring about a lasting and comprehensive peace based on legitimate international resolutions. Quite the contrary, Israel is continuing its flagrant violations of international law, as well as its unjustifiable use of disproportionate force and resort to its military machine, in violation of agreed international instruments and understandings.

Israel does not respect international resolutions or international humanitarian law or the Fourth Geneva Convention. Its arbitrary practices, including embargoes, arrests and the destruction of infrastructure, are destroying the lives of Palestinian people on a daily basis. Such actions are contrary to logic and reason. Israel is attempting to abort and destroy all initiatives for peace, including the most recent — the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut Summit.

The Israeli Government is able to continue its hostile acts because of the passivity of the international community and the failure of the Security Council to live up to its obligations to maintain international peace and security and to ensure the implementation of its resolutions. Israel has continued its hostilities, in spite of international concern, by claiming that it is acting in self-defence, and considers that its acts of terrorism are legitimate and acceptable. Examples of Israel's hostile acts and its failure to respect international law include its actions to destroy the

cultural identity of the Palestinian people and to change the facts on the ground by constructing the racist separation wall, which prevents Palestinians from gaining access to their fields, their places of work and their universities and schools, as well as to health and social services. Today, 220,000 Palestinians have no access to clean potable water.

Israel insists that its unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was to give the Palestinians their rights and freedom; this is a false claim and the withdrawal was simply a ruse. The hopes of the Palestinians were destroyed within the first few months after the so-called withdrawal by Israel, because the facts on the ground showed that Israel still controlled the land, sea and airspace. Thus, Israel exercises firm control over the Gaza Strip, and all means of access to it are covered by the occupation army. This means that the area's inhabitants are prisoners who are forced to accept occupation with all its injustices and indignities.

Tension and violence persist in the occupied territories, because the Road Map has not been carried out, the Arab Peace Initiative has not been accepted and international resolutions have not been implemented.

However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has hope that reason will prevail. In order to correct this situation in the region, the Security Council must exercise its mandate, as enshrined in the Charter — namely, the maintenance of international peace and security. It is illogical that this situation should continue — and it has already continued for six decades — for it will affect the credibility of the United Nations in the world's eyes.

Peoples of the world witness daily flagrant Israeli violations that run counter to all international laws and norms and that do not conform to international humanitarian law.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its invitation to Israel to implement international resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to establish peace and security in the region in place of destruction and to direct its attention to development and peaceful coexistence. That can be achieved by recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people, including a return to the 1967 borders and a guarantee for the right of return of refugees, the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and return of the occupied Golan and other occupied

land in Lebanon. The international community must play its role and deal with the root causes of these regional conflicts. The cause of these conflicts is the absence of a comprehensive, just peace. Pressure must be brought to bear on Israel to comply with and implement the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its leader, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, reiterate its call for an international conference on the Palestinian question to be attended by all parties, to discuss peace initiatives and translate them into concrete steps in order to protect the Palestinian people from the killing and terrorism exercised by Israel without any deterrence.

With regard to Lebanon, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requests all political powers in Lebanon to safeguard the unity and sovereignty of their country and to give precedence to the language of dialogue among themselves. The Lebanese should not give an opportunity to terrorists to act in a way that can only undermine the stability and peace of the country. In this context, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its support to Lebanon and its people.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regrets all acts of violence committed in the name of sectarianism and religious extremism, and condemns all acts of violence irrespective of their source. We call upon the permanent members of the Security Council and Iraq's neighbour countries to exercise their responsibility to support Iraq, its territorial unity and national independence and not to undermine the internal cohesion and social balance, the brotherliness and solidarity that unite the different tribes, faiths and regional groups in Iraq.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the importance of non-interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and non-infringement on its sovereignty and identity. Iraq needs international support in order to exercise its sovereignty, independence and identity, and to promote unity at the national and regional levels. Present and future initiatives on Iraq must come from within Iraq and must express the free and independent will of the Iraqi people in all its sectors and groups. It is clear that religious authorities of all faiths in Iraq have a great responsibility, and they need to use their influence to promote solidarity, unity and brotherliness among all citizens of the Iraqi nation.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): Let me begin by associating myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Permanent Representative of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. My delegation expresses our appreciation to him for presenting the report of the Committee, as contained in document A/61/35. My delegation fully endorses the observations, conclusions and recommendations contained in the report. My delegation also expresses appreciation to the Secretary-General for presenting his report, as contained in document A/61/355.

The question of Palestine and the struggle of the Palestinian people in exercising their inalienable rights have been on the agenda of the Assembly for almost four decades. Their desire for an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, has not been met and continues to be blocked by Israel, the occupying Power. The Palestinian people have experienced unimaginable suffering for far too long.

My delegation fully sympathizes with the plight and the dire circumstances of the Palestinian people. Extrajudicial killings, killings of innocent civilians, unlawful detention, excessive and indiscriminate use of force and illegal confiscation of Palestinian land by Israel and its State terrorism apparatus continue unabated. Extensive damage and destruction continue to be inflicted upon Palestinian infrastructure, homes and properties. The construction of the separation wall, which has been declared contrary to international law by the International Court of Justice, has not ceased; instead, it has proceeded, turning the occupied Palestinian territory into a vast open-air prison.

Malaysia strongly condemns all inhumane and brutal actions by Israel that violate international law and international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Malaysia demands once again that those actions be ended immediately.

My delegation continues to recognize the important role of the members of the diplomatic Quartet. We recognize the challenges that they are facing in ensuring the full and unconditional implementation of the Road Map. The Road Map that they had painstakingly drafted has provided real hope

for peace. Unfortunately, three years have gone by since its adoption, and that hope for peace remains but a distant dream.

Death, destruction and despair continue on both sides. Given the current situation on the ground and the steadily deteriorating overall situation in the region, it appears that the Road Map has been deliberately asphyxiated by Israel, clearly a power mightier than the members of the Quartet combined. Unfortunately, serious efforts to put the Road Map back on track have apparently been an exercise in futility. It would seem that putting Israel in the driver's seat has done nothing but to ensure that the Road Map has led to nowhere.

My delegation shares the frustration of the international community, particularly of Palestine and its Arab neighbours, at the lack of progress in finding a solution to the conflict. We therefore call upon the international community to collectively generate a new approach towards the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict, bearing in mind the need to resolve it in the larger framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In that connection, my delegation supports the call by the League of Arab States for a new Middle East peace conference. This effort must place the United Nations at its core. Unlike its role in the Quartet, we believe that the United Nations should not merely play a subservient role in that envisaged process, bearing in mind its permanent responsibility in efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects.

While serious efforts to resuscitate the Middle East peace process are under way, my delegation reiterates once again that we must immediately establish an international mechanism to protect the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, as called for in operative paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution ES-10/16. We believe that under the present circumstances of heightened tension, only the forcible separation of the two sides to the conflict would provide the necessary peace and security that would enable the resumption of negotiations aimed at a political settlement.

As Chair of the Tenth Islamic Summit Conference and member of the Non-Aligned Movement Troika, Malaysia will continue to work closely with the international community and the United Nations to seek a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine,

based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the principle of Land for Peace.

In this connection, Malaysia, in close cooperation with the United Nations, will host the United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People. These two important events will take place in Kuala Lumpur from 15 to 17 December 2006. Malaysia hopes that the outcome of these events will contribute to ongoing efforts by the international community to seek a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine.

The General Assembly remains the last bastion of hope for the Palestinian people. Let us remind ourselves that the United Nations shoulders a permanent responsibility in resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects. Let us not disappoint the Palestinians, whose faith in the United Nations is steadily diminishing as a result of the Organization's inability to stop the incessant Israeli acts of aggression and suppression. We must respond to the call by Palestine to the international community to shoulder its responsibility to protect the lives of its defenceless population from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel and, equally importantly, to end Israeli occupation.

Let us continue collectively our efforts to realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. My delegation expresses hope that serious efforts currently under way, in particular by the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, to revive the Middle East peace process will produce the outcome long desired by the international community.

Programme of work

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would now like to inform the members of some amendments that have been added to the agenda of the General Assembly on 4 December 2006. In addition to the first item considered in the morning session, agenda item 10 on the role of diamonds in fuelling conflict, the Assembly will take up as the second item the reports of the Sixth Committee, which were originally scheduled for the afternoon of Monday, 4 December. As a third item, the Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 43 on the return or restitution of cultural

property to the countries of origin, so as to take action on draft resolution A/61/L.15. As the fourth item, the Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 44 on a culture of peace, so as to take action on draft resolution A/61/L.16. Finally, as the fifth item, the Assembly will resume its consideration of sub-items

(c), (e), (r), (s) and (t), of agenda item 108 on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations, in order to take action on draft resolutions A/61/L.13, A/61/L.18, A/61/L.20, Rev.1, A/61/L.29 and A/61/L.37.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.